Flying Saucers From

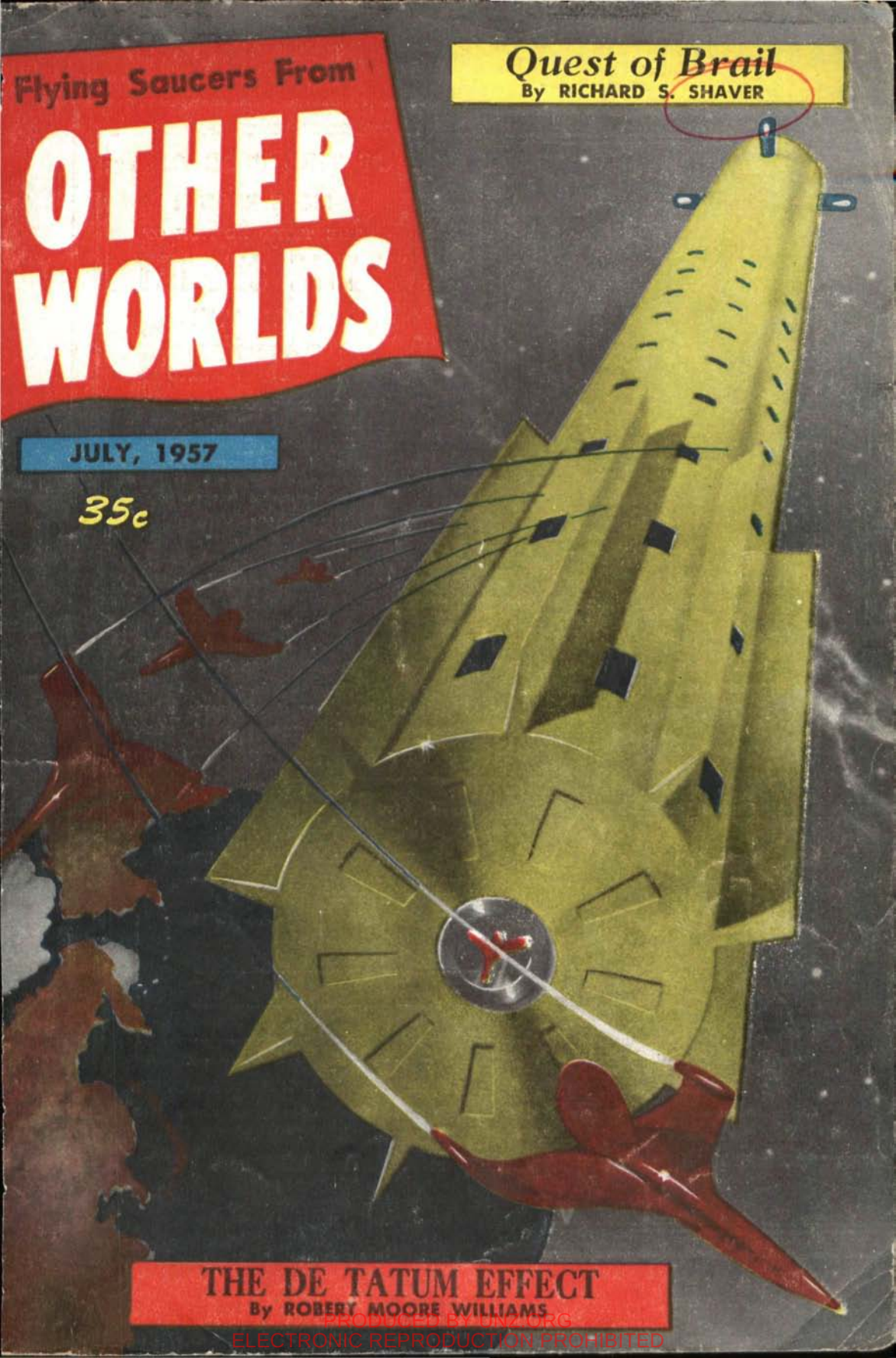
OTHER WORLDS

JULY, 1957

35c

Quest of Brail

By RICHARD S. SHAVER



THE DE TATUM EFFECT

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

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FLYING SAUCERS FROM OTHER WORLDS

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RAY KIMBALL, 106 W. DELO AVE., DRAPER, N. C.

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....Editorial...

Did you know that YOU, as a science fiction fan, have a problem? And it's a pretty big problem! We know that you'll be alarmed when we tell you that your favorite kind of reading matter is threatened with extinction.

Although it isn't being said out loud in editorial and publishing circles as yet, since most editors and publishers are "whistling in the dark". But this is one editor who can face a fact and bring it right to his readers! So, if you're at all interested in what's really going on, read on, and then do what you can to save the situation.

First, publishers of science fiction in the last five years have not gotten rich. Most of them have barely scraped by, while many actually did go out of business. Others who **should** have gone out of business, hung on for what they frankly admit was for sentimental reasons. Briefly, their problem has been the rising cost of producing magazines, and coupled with the fact that science fiction never has been a tremendous volume seller (tops was the 185,000 circulation of **Amazing Stories** when your editor was at the helm); this has eliminated all chance at any reasonable profit. Advertisers find response to sf readership is very low, consequently there is little income from advertising. Subscriptions are carried only as a courtesy, actually, because they rarely number more than 2000 for each magazine. And for the first six months of 1956, the average sale of **all** science fiction magazines was 49%! As a publisher, we can tell you that it is necessary to sell 55% to break even (except in the case of our own magazine, and Bill Hamling's magazines, which are not handicapped with high overhead).

Next comes the distributor. He has found it hard to get a profit out of a type of publication where the returns average 51%. Most other magazines run about 70%, while the best ones sell in the 90% bracket. Thus, compared to the other types of magazines, science fiction cannot be given the same costly treatment without losing money.

Finally, and this is where the real trouble is, the dealer who sells you your copy has finally decided to buck off the burr under his saddle. He is bewildered by the enormous number of magazines, and his lack of space in which to display them; so he has decided to "select" just enough titles to give them all proper display, and reject all the rest. His overhead costs in handling returns have outstripped his profits on many magazines. Especially on science fiction. Thus, a trend has developed, and it is growing swiftly, to "selectivity". All "unprofitable" titles are being rejected. And where they are accepted, they remain on sale only so long as the space is not required for a "better seller". This results in what is called the "premature". Time was when these prematures were distributed to other newsstands, but no more. Now they are dead the first time back.

Your editor has been a science fiction fan for 31 years. He will always be one. But if the present trend continues, he'll have to be satisfied

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with reading his collection of back issues! And so will you. There is little that can be done, except pronounce the doom that will soon be admitted by everyone. Not that **all** science fiction magazines will die — perhaps a group of 4 or 5 will remain. But in order to save their skins, you'll have to do the ONLY THING that might save the day. It is very simple. ALWAYS buy your copy of your favorite science fiction magazine at the SAME NEWSSTAND. Only the dealer who has a positive regular monthly sale on a title will consider keeping it in stock. So, take our advice, and let your dealer know you are going to buy your copy from him every month. That way he'll know exactly how many copies to order, and he won't be plagued with having to send back returns.

The next issue of this magazine will once more feature flying saucers, and we hope you like it as well as you liked the June issue! But for those science fiction fans who don't care much for flying saucers, and who will skip the August issue, we'll tell you what's coming up in the September issue. First, there's "Blacksheep's Angel" by Alexander Blade, which we want to give special mention — because we liked it tremendously.

Then there's William Gray's unusual little story "Colfim". It keeps up the pace set by Blacksheep's Angel, and in itself would be the "one" in any lineup which would make an issue worthwhile.

When it comes to stories that really strike deep into the emotions, we think Charles L. Fontenay, has a knack. You'll find "The Heart's Long Wait" exactly that kind of story.

Lastly is another story by Richard S. Shaver which we have selected as one of the best of his long list of triumphs. "Quest of Brail" in this issue should give you some idea of what to expect.

Most of you, we presume, saw the comet which was visible during April and May? To a science fiction fan, this spectacle was of special interest, and we wonder how many of you thought, as you looked at it, of the role the comet has played in science fiction? We could go way back to the very first issue of **Amazing Stories** in 1926 and recall Hector Servedac's "Off on a Comet"; and we could recall all the stories written about these mysterious visitors from space. For mysteries they are indeed! Nobody knows anything about them, actually. And so, when we think of Richard Shaver's stories of them in which he calls them "cometrams", or a sort of interstellar regularly scheduled "bus line", we are fascinated by the possibility. What if the comets actually are such a bus line, and that space ships enroute to very distant destinations can "hook a ride" by the simple expedient of making connections with the various comets? Judging from the recent rash of flying saucer sightings, Richard Shaver may be right after all!

How many people know that Halley's comet, which came back in 1910, and is due again in 1986, is a very strange comet, in that it **changes size**, in a bewildering way. At one time while in sight, it measured some 30,000 miles in diameter, and at another, as much as 300,000 miles! This is about 300 times as big as this year's comet! Also, the Earth passed through the tail of Halley's comet without harm.

Some astronomers think comets are made of ice; others that they are masses of small particles no bigger than marbles, and gas. What do you think?

—Rap

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A WOMAN IS A NON-MECHANICAL THING

By Evelyn Martin

"Fools!" Drac cried wildly, his feet stumbling over the quake - torn ground. "Fools, all of them!"

His chest heaved with the effort of drawing oxygen from the thinning atmosphere of a world whose tortured sun was going into nova. About him, the multi - colored spewings of erupting volcanos made an aurora in the sky, spectacular against the blue - black clouds that fled before the hurricanes that ripped the surface.

Over his body the skin was blistering, peeling, under the heat.

A flying piece of debris struck him solidly between the shoulders, and sent him to his knees, crying and cursing. He had to get to the ship! If only it were still intact, there might be time to escape the doomed world before the suffering sun exploded everything into nothingness.

The waters had risen, receded, and changed the face of the ravished land. Beneath him, the ground shuddered. He covered his head with his arms against the falling volcanic ashes. Above the unholy shrieking and howling of the wind, he thought he heard a human voice!

The quake subsided as he rose to his feet and turned toward the origin of the sound. They couldn't all be dead — not yet!

His eyes smarted and began to water from the cutting wind. Through the smoky atmosphere, he recognized the figure of a girl. She was dressed in the remains of the flowing white robe of a Temple Virgin. Kneeling amidst the fury of a world gone mad, she was staring sightlessly at the horror in the skies. From a cut on her temple, crimson flowed over her cheek, staining her ragged vestment. Even in her extremity, she clung to the golden circlet of Nekka, praying soundlessly to the impotent disc.

Wrestling with the tearing wind, Drac pulled her to her feet. Wide black eyes against a chalk - white face stared in shock at the not yet healed scar of Nekka on his chest, visible through his torn garment.

Cringing, she inscribed the holy circle in the air between them. "You're — you're one of Them!" she gasped.

He caught her wrist, cruelly. "There's still a chance to escape.

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A half - mile from here, underground, I have a ship. With it, we can still get away!"

"A ship? A Machine? Never!"

He shook her, roughly.

"Don't be a fool. This world is dying — dying fast! Do you want to die with it?"

She kissed the golden circlet. "It shall be as Nekka wills."

Black rage overcame him at her passive attitude. This was the result of a civilization that hated machines. These were the people who had imprisoned him because he learned the old secrets; because he was wise enough to predict death of their world. Memory of the weeks of indignity he had suffered at the hands of the priests of Nekka returned, and the circle of sin they had carved into his quivering flesh burned anew with his crimson anger.

"I'm going to save you, whether you want it or not. I can't leave you here to die."

She writhed in his grasp, struggled fiercely in the wierd half - light of the stricken world. The sky seemed to boil in agony, as the blue clouds grew blacker, and the wind rose in fury. Savagely, his fist cracked against the point of her jaw. She slumped, instantly.

Her form was slight, but it became an immediate burden under the intolerable conditions about them. The ship lay ahead — deep in the earth, in an alloy nest, the strongest alloy the planet could produce. It must be safe. It must!

The contour of the land had changed. Shifting rock and falling debris had covered the opening to his shaft. He could have wept.

At last the golden gleam of the special metal caught his eye. He lowered the limp form of the girl to the steaming surface and strained his mighty muscles against the covering rock. There was the shaft! Bent, twisted, but still safe, still big and straight enough to offer a release valve for the priceless ship, lodged far beneath like a yolk in an eggshell. His friends had been wise to choose this spot as the safest on the planet. Much of the rest of the world had been submerged under the mountainous tidal waves that swept the land.

But his precious shaft had withstood the quakes, and the serpentine length of the ladder still extended down the gleaming sides. Tucking the girl under his good arm, he began the laborious descent.

The metal was scalding, searing his blistered hands. A jagged spur ripped through his boot, slicing his foot. The warm drip of blood made his footing uncertain. It became a descent into hell, with the need for haste a demon on his back.

His feet were numb. They refused to accept reality when at last they touched bottom, and could go no further. The muscles of his thighs moved in great quivering jerks as he carried the girl into the ship.

Throwing her hastily on an acceleration couch, he drew the straps cruelly tight. His hands caressed the untested metal like a beloved child. He knew the ship was good. It had to be. Every detail had been worked out carefully, lovingly, by the loyal band of men who had defied the laws of Nekka, and learned the secrets of their ancestors. Drac's lips twisted bitterly. Dead now — all of them — Jacx, Gylls, Biert, Keltr — his dearest friends. Dead because they dared to speak, and try to warn the people of this archaic world they loved.

A touch of his hands, and power-

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ful rockets began to roar their defiance to death. A pillar of flame beat against the confining walls of the space ship's prison. Slowly at first, then faster and faster, the ship shot from the tube, upward into the angry elements. Drac never knew when he left the world. He was in blackout.

When his eyes opened, they saw only the jet black of space, studded with the gleaming lights that were stars. He shook his head, clearing it of the cobwebs that were sticky in his brain. Beside him, the girl began to stir, to moan in half-remembered nightmare.

Forcing his aching body into motion, he turned the screen back, back, upon the world that lay behind them. A sharp intake of breath told him that the girl was seeing, too. The screen exploded into flame, molten, liquid - seeming, even upon the flat screen.

Then there was nothing. Where once there existed a sun, a planetary system, living beings, there was now nothing. The sun was a small dark star, drifting alone amid memories of grandeur.

The girl turned her face away. Gently now, shaken by the catastrophe, Drac loosened her confining bonds. She refused to look at him, but sat in a crumpled heap, the dark waves of her hair screening her face.

"It is over." His words were a requiem. "It is over, and we alone survived. Can't you see I was right? We could have saved so many!"

"With **Machines?**" she asked bitterly. A toss of her head sent the dark hair tumbling over one shoulder. "The vengeance of Nekka has been accomplished. The Machines almost caused the death of our world before, during the Great Wars. You and people like you tried to return to the Machine, and the end of our world is Nekka's revenge."

He listened to her words in silence. It would serve no purpose to argue with her. She had been nurtured in the belief of Nekka, that all machines were evil. He must lead her gently — gently —

"What is your name, child? We have a long journey before us. It is better that we live in peace together."

She looked at him oddly. "My name is Morra. And yours?"

"Drac."

"We are accursed, Drac. Nekka will not forgive. Why did you not leave me in peace, to perish with my God, rather than entomb me in a living death within these metal walls?"

"Someday, Morra, I hope you learn the answer to that question. Someday may be sooner than you think, if the space warp works."

"Space warp?" The words were unfamiliar on her tongue.

"There are other worlds, my dear — and other suns."

"Sacrilege!" She shrank from him.

"Nevertheless, it is true. Face it, Morra. We are man and woman, survivors of a dead world. It is our duty to make a new world, to see that the race of man does not die."

"Better it die, than be cursed with Machines." There was spirit in her voice. "Never speak of this to me again. We shall soon die, anyway."

He sighed, but kept his peace. In the long, confining months that were to follow, he found that Morra could be adamant. She was lovely — lovely beyond belief. The man-yearning rose within him, became intensified by her nearness, but she would have none of him.

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The long search for a habitable world became interminable. Star after star was sighted; they suffered the agonies of leaving space - warp, but it was a parody of frustration. The world they sought was a needle in the haystack of infinity.

They slept, side by side, in the narrow confines of the ship. The vestments of the Temple Virgin had become loin cloth and bra strap for the sake of modesty. Her skin was fragrant, and sweet — yet he could not taste of its fulfilment. She no longer hated him. She merely endured him.

A new star rose in the view screen. Only four planets circled its warm fire, but Drac went out of space warp, into regular drive, to search again. Morra's lips were pinched, her face drawn and pale.

"Are you not yet convinced that your search is useless? It is the fault of the Machine, always pulling man onward to a fate not meant to be his, always promising a Utopia they can never deliver."

His temper began to burst its bounds, a rare occasion with Drac.

"What would you have me do? Head into the nearest star?"

Her eyes gleamed, half mad with fanaticism.

"And why not? Perish in the blaze of one of Nekka's children — a glorious death! This is not life — it is half death, and Nekka's punishment for what you and others like you have done."

"But you are here with me," he reminded her gently. "What have you to do with machines?"

"I do not know," she cried wildly. "I search my soul for the answer. Perhaps Nekka was not convinced of my true faith — perhaps Nekka gave me this test to determine my true will!"

His lips tightened as he turned away. The planet beneath was emerald and lush with vegetation. He only prayed that upon this rare green planet, the color would prove to be clorophyll, the life - base carbon.

Drac prayed as the ship swept through what was undeniably an atmosphere. There were clouds — clouds surely formed of water droplets, and not of poisonous gases. A little nearer the planet, and he could have cried out his hope. There were blue oceans, beneath — oceans he knew must contain life - giving water.

He turned the ship stern - wise to the planet, automatically. His finger pressed the braking button — and nothing happened! There was no blast of force from the rockets to slow their fall. They were hurtling, hull white hot toward the surface beneath!

Desperately, he pushed again and again at the plunger. At last, there came an answering blast of flame. Even as Drac felt the rush and push of force, he knew it was too late.

The ship crashed, stern - wise onto the surface of the planet, the landing mechanism buckling under the force of the blow.

It was a long time before Drac wakened. He was lying across the control board. The agonizing pain in his chest told him that he had fractured more than one rib. Anxiously, he wiped his fist across his mouth. Relieved, he saw there was no blood. In all probability, his lungs had not been punctured.

Morra was lying, limp and white, still strapped in her decelleration couch. There was a blackish - blue bruise on her temple, but the swelling breasts under the strip of halter still rose and fell rhythmically.

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She lived.

Drac crawled toward her reclining form, every moment an agony of blazing red fire. He released Morra, then saw the whirling white spots dancing before his vision that preceded fainting. A great nausea rolled into his midriff, and he let his head fall down onto her bosom, where it had never lain, as he swallowed the saliva that gushed into his mouth.

Finally he raised his head, sick and dizzy. Morra's eyes were flickering now, beginning to open. Drac rose to his feet, painfully, and looked at the dials on the board.

The first thing he saw were the indications of oxygen and water vapor. They could breathe! Suddenly, he couldn't wait to open the doors of the ship, and breathe free, bountiful air again.

Feebly he opened the air lock. It was morning. The grass was wet with dew; the frond - like protuberences of the trees glistening in the early light.

The air was fresh, and sweet. He heard Morra give a little cry, behind him, and he turned to see her staring, eyes wide, at the beauty of the new world.

"We found it, Morra." To his surprise, his voice was thick. "We found a new world!"

Suddenly he knew he was falling, but he couldn't help himself. He was sore, and sick, and he had found the world he searched for. He heard Morra's cry as he fell, helplessly, to the cold metal of the floor.

When his eyes opened again, groggily, they focused upon a fluttering yellow object that was never still. As the mists of unconsciousness cleared away, he recognized the object as a butterfly — the first life they had seen, anywhere, since he and Morra blasted away from their obliterated world.

The smell of food told him he was ravenous, and he turned his head toward the source of the aroma, painfully. Morra had built a fire, and a fragrant concoction was boiling merrily above it.

His chest was tightly bound with strips of his own shirt and he lay in a pile of drying grasses. Despite his injured chest, he drew in great fragrant gusts of the delightful smell of living things.

"Feeling better?"

He heard Morra's voice behind him. Turning, he watched her slender figure as she came out of the forest into the clearing. A limp rodent - like creature dangled from one hand, a creature she had obviously snared.

"You're quite the primitive woman, I see." He couldn't help the tinge of frost that crept into his voice. It was incongruous, that she should be the one to provide the first meal in their new home, and tend him like a baby, while he lay unconscious.

Morra's fingers moved deftly as she began to clean the animal.

"I am a creature of Nekka's will," she told him serenely. An inner strength shone from her, told him that she was sufficient unto herself; capable of tending her own wants, and his too, if need be.

He noticed that she was cleaning the animal with a sharpened stone, from which chips had been painfully flaked by drops of water on the heated rock.

"I have a knife, Morra. In my scabbard."

Long lashes fell, veiled her eyes in shame.

"I lost it, Drac. Forgive me — I was cutting the vines for the snare

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when a noise frightened me, and I dropped the knife and ran. I could not find it again."

He smiled, almost happily. Some of his self respect returned. Morra wasn't so perfect after all. "Don't worry about it," he said. "You seem to have made a good substitute."

"Yes." Her eyes were an enigma as she brought his food, steaming and fragrant, on a slab of bark. Drac looked at it hungrily. He did mention the bark, however. He didn't care for fragments of unfamiliar vegetation in his food.

"Aren't there any dishes?" He felt a note of exasperation in his voice.

"All broken in the crash. Go ahead and eat, Drac. It will make you strong."

He looked with disgust at the sharpened sticks with which she had provided him as eating utensils.

"At least get me a fork."

Nodding her head, she ducked into the opened hatch of the space ship. She returned bearing a fork, but a fork so bent and twisted that it was impossible to use. Drac looked at it sharply.

"Look's like the kitchen ware got the worst of the crash."

"Yes." She lowered her eyes demurely, under his suspicious eyes. Slowly, he began to eat.

The next day, they began to hack a home out of the wilderness. In application, Morra's knowledge of how to go about building a home from nature on this primitive world exceeded his. Though a perfectionist in everything else, Morra was unforgivably careless. She forgot tools, lost them, delayed their efforts unbearably. The day she lost the axe head, in a deep impenetrable stream, was the last straw.

"You don't care if we live or die," he accused her angrily. "You deliberately let that axe head slide into that water!"

Her face was pained. "The handle was loose. Please forgive me," she said, her eyes brimming with something suspiciously like tears. Drac had the heart to say no more. Yet he looked at the half completed cabin, and he could have wept. How would he ever fell the trees to complete it?

The next morning, Morra had the answer. She must have remained awake all night, hovered over the tiny camp fire, flaking away the bits of stone with a drop of water here, a drop of water there — but she had created an excellent axe - head. Already, she had secured it with thongs to the carved handle.

She presented it to him humbly. "I'm really sorry about the axe. Maybe this will help."

It did. The mornings were getting cooler, heralding the approach of winter. They were working on the chimney, chinking the stones with straw and mud. In the evening, Morra was working on woman - things — a loom, upon which she was weaving mats of long, slim grasses — pottery, cooking utensils. Drac was thankful for the good tiredness of his muscles, that fought his desire for her. She worked by his side, shoulder to shoulder; her sweat merged with his when they raised a log, or chinked a stone, but she would have none of him. Even the cabin would have been easier to build, had it not been for the fact that she insisted upon separate quarters. Two rooms were much harder to build than one.

The lower forms of life were plentiful on their new world, but nothing they had ever seen had evidenced the presence of any high-

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er form which could have evolved into man, or a semblance of man. Gradually, he relaxed his vigilance.

The cabin grew, slowly. Before the cold of winter had arrived, it was a snug haven against the elements. Drac only hoped there would be game during the winter months. All he had left was his pistol. Morra had accidentally knocked his gun out of his hands, one morning when they were in the hills, and the cry of a feline - like creature had startled her. The gun had fallen into a crevasse, deep enough to make the gun unretrievable.

The morning that the first snow began to fall, Drac went hunting. He was careful not to go too far away from the cabin, not knowing how deep the snowfall would be. When it covered his boot soles, he decided to return.

Morra wasn't in the cabin. Outside, he could see the space ship, a dark hulk through the snow. Across the tell - tale waste of white, between the cabin and the ship, he saw Morra's footprints.

Suddenly, a longing for her rose within him — a longing for her complacence, her warmth, the peace she held about her. It had been a long time since he had really tried to talk to Morra. Somehow he had to make her understand that they were alone, here in this snow - shrouded wilderness; as far as they knew, the last man and the last woman.

He started toward the ship. He had taken hardly two steps when he saw the blast of fire from the rockets.

"Morra," he screamed, in dreadful fear, in helplessness. "Morra!"

Then he saw her slight figure, running from the ship. Even as she ran, light footed over the snow, the truth came to him. She had destroyed, systematically, all the other vestiges of the civilization he had tried to save. This was the last, big barrier to the triumph of Nekka. The genius of man was vanishing with the ship that was rising now, erractically, staggering on the stem of fire.

He was sick with the uselessness of it all. Morra was beside him now, her breasts rising and falling deeply with the force of her breathing.

When the ship had disappeared, he turned toward her, bitterly.

"I should have left you, and your glorious Nekka, back on our home planet. You have destroyed our last remnant of civilization with your religious mania. Does your Nekka think man should return to the beasts?"

"Man is a beast — but he is a beast with a soul. It is man's responsibility what he does with that soul. It's all gone now, Drac . . . all but the gun you wear at your hip. Won't you throw that away, too, so we can begin again?"

Drac gave a snort of disgust, as he turned away, and slammed the leather - hinged door of the cabin. The interior was dim, and familiar, the reed - plaited curtains rustling softly at the windows. Morra's crude loom huddled gently in one corner; the pottery she had molded and painfully baked with her hands, on the hearth of the mud - stone fireplace. Nowhere was there an evidence of machinery, or any evidence that machinery had ever existed.

Insiduously, craftily, bit by bit, she had removed the things she hated, and replaced them with things she loved. It was her home, her way of life —

Cruelly, he smashed his fist downward on the heavy table. It was well

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built. It didn't even quiver under the force of the blow. He had been so sure he could convert Morra to his own beliefs, and this was the outcome!

He walked, on leaden feet, to the door of her room. So many times he had longed to pull aside the thin curtain, and force himself upon her adamant body. Only the belief that he could conquer Nekka and bring her to himself willingly, had prevented him from taking her in forceful lust.

There were fluffy dried flowers, left from the autumn, on her altar. Above it, the circle of Nekka gleamed benignly. Drac's shoulders slumped.

"You win, Nekka." He gave a gesture of defeat toward the inaminate circle.

"Drac!" Morra cried softly. He hadn't heard her when she walked up behind him. "I've waited so long to hear you say that!"

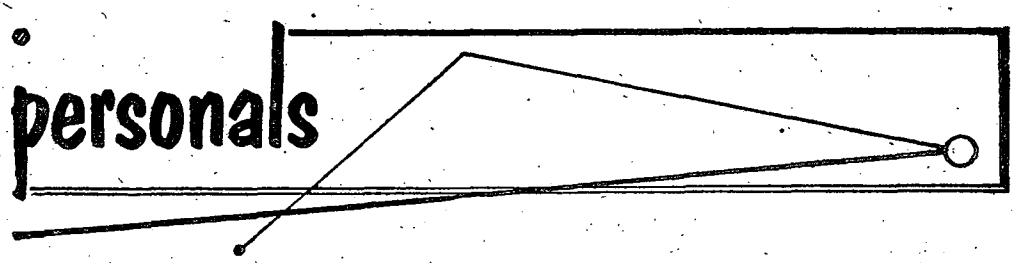
He turned, to see tears of joy in her eyes. Suddenly, he dared to hope again.

"Now we can be married, Drac. Now you can have your new race of man. Life can begin again, on our knees before Nekka!"

There was one thing still to do. Quietly, he took the gun from his belt, and laid it on the altar. Then he opened his arms, and felt her lithe body as it nestled into every curve of his own.

He kissed her hungrily, possessively. Between kisses, he managed to murmur, with a grin: "After all — who needs a gun in paradise?"

THE END



For sale: Astounding: Jan. '45 to Dec. '49, 50c each. Jan. '50 to present, 30c each. OW No. 5 to No. 31, 30c each. Galaxy April '51 to March '54, 30c each. Postpaid. H. Malamud, 122 Eames Place, Bronx 68, N. Y. . . . *Wanted: the first* 9 *issues of Madge and the first* 3 *of OW. State condition and price. Allan Rast,* 741 *Myrtle St., Hayward, Calif.* . . . For sale: Astounding Sf from 1936 to 1943. Complete list sent upon request. Price $1.00 pre-'40, 75c rest. R. M. Bethke, 246 Nicoll St., New Haven, Conn. . . . *For Sale: ERBurroughs "Pellucidar" and "Mars" books. Also hard cover copies "From Unknown Worlds" anthology and other rare stf items. George W. Earley,* 9 *Hiram Lane, Bloomfield, Conn.* . . . I will pay 25c for all comics circa 1940. Tom Cagle, 3403 Harrison St., El Paso, Texas . . . *Wanted to buy or trade for: Vol.* 1 *Number* 1 *of Galaxy; Nos.* 1-14, 17, 18, 21-28, 29-34 *and* 40 (19) *of OW; Nos.* 2, 3, 5 *of Infinity; No.* 3 *of Science Fiction Adventures; Nos.* 2, 3-9 *of Universe; Nos.* 1-4 *of Science Stories. Also for trade or sale, Vol.* 1, *No.* 1 *Planet Stories* (1939) *in excellent condition. Will sell for* $1.50, *but prefer to trade. Write first. Leslie Gerber,* 201 *Linden Blvd., Brooklyn* 26, *N. Y.* . . . Wanted: EC comics from 1952 on back. Vault of Horror, Two Fisted Tales, Weird Science and Weird Fantasy, Frontline, Combat, Tales from the Crypt. Also want Shaver in good condition. Billy Trotter, 1847 Cassamia Place, Charlotte, N. C. . . . *I will pay high prices (up to* 30c) *for any Wonder Woman Comics issued before* 1954. *Send list and state price. Jack Sayers,* 1280 *Winston Ave., San Marino* 9, *Calif.*

THE END

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SPACESHIP NAMED DESIRE

By

S. J. Byrne

Madge was dead, and I didn't care if I lived either. That's why I signed with this cutthroat, ore-grabbing shipping company, snatching thonon from Saturn's Ring. No more desire left in me than in the cold metal of this ship . . .

LOOK at that tub! Jupiter!—and they expect me to prospect the Ring with **that!** This thing is a Solar Patrol surplus job. I don't care **how** they converted it — it's no match for this god-forsaken foreign legion's work. I'll bet the crew matches it, though. Space bums, all of them — every "Dear John" and "little brown jug" refugee in the system. Wouldn't throw their lives away on the Ring if they weren't fit to throw away in the first place.

But who am **I** to talk?

Oh God! Madge, why did you have to die! Why in the name of a thousand hells were we built for each other exclusively—in all this love-barren universe?

Well, what the dickens. Let's go on board and get it over with . . .

* * *

"So **you're** Captain Price. ."

Don't like this guy. More blubber than brains **or** brawn. I think he's even proud of those gold caps on his teeth. Horse tooth. That's what I'll call him. Probably got that left eye dimmed out in some no account brawl down in the Belt. What does **he** know to be a first mate on a Ring metal runner? Hope he picks a fight with me sometime. No space navy rules in this motherless outfit . . .

"How did you guess?"

"All right. So you're the Old Man. Might as well get used to that. That's what they're going to call you. Want me to call crew inspection?"

You can understand a man, though, when he's liable to swing at you 'cause he hates your guts! So we're wearing a chip already. Well, that's **something** to fight off boredom and keep us both from walking out an airlock. I knew this tailor-made uniform would make 'em gnash their teeth. Maybe that's why I wore it. Orneriness out here is like a cheap jag. You gotta stay on a jag to live through it anyway. And am **I** gonna be ornery!

"Not yet. I **know** they're a mess of spacedrift. What I'm worried about is this bilge tank they call a metal runner. What's it got?"

I knew **that** would get a rise out of him!

"We don't call this ship "it," **Sir.** With us this ship is a **she.** The men like her, and if you want to be pop-

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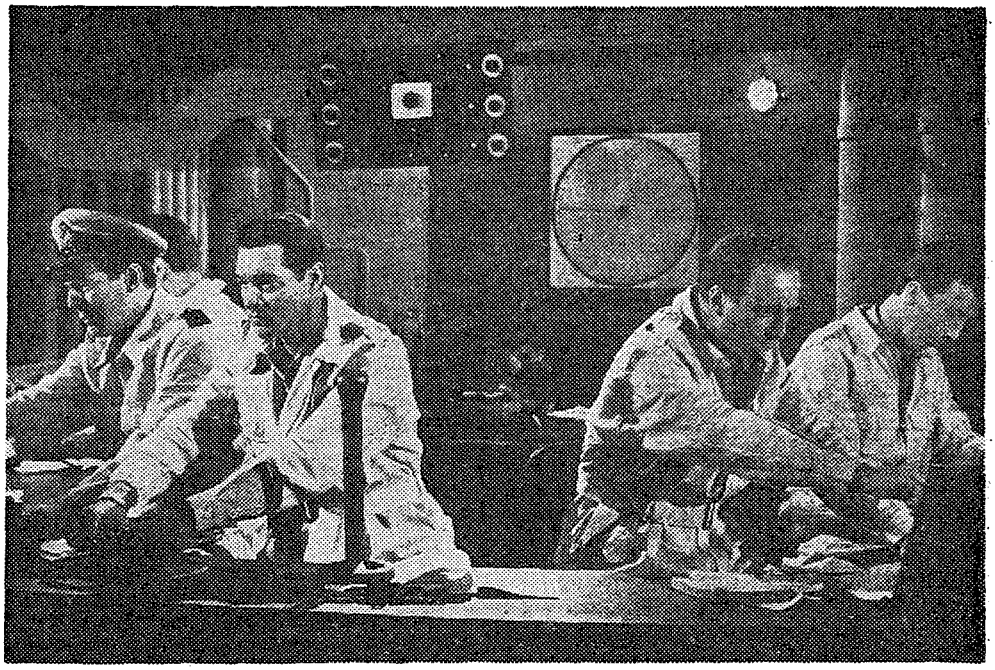

From the movie "Fire Maidens of Outer Space"

"Call to stations: Men, we're going into the Ring. Ready for 5 G's - Off cyber on manual. Prepare for accelleration."

ular—"

"What's popularity got to do with fighting the Ring and the Titan Company? You swallow your rations, wrestle with space sickness, take your hibersleep and bring home the paydirt—or you're a Belt drifter, which is the last step down after this . . . So you're all hard up and this ship is a woman. Okay. **It's** a she. What's the old biddy carry?"

Look at him grin. You'd think she (it) was a first line comp-ray gunner!

"Okay, **Captain.** You asked for it. I'll let you in on a secret. Ha! Ha! She's got cyber-control throughout."

Cyber. That was obsolete twenty years ago. But what can you expect out here among the moons of Saturn? Comp-rays to guide your ships? After all, even Titan Company's on cyber. They're no better than us, even if their station **is** the only one this side of the Belt that has a woman for every man.

"So?"

"Yeah, and that's a long ways from being **all** she's got. **This** cyber recon job takes in all features. Course, bomb trajectories, magna-trac, Ring analysis, air rehab, alien ship alarm, deathray, screen-block, and of course meteorpel. She don't ride no computation beam like the pansies down in the Inner System, but her cyclo-pulse is a juiced up superdrive that'll tear your guts out when you want it. The rest is standard—anti-gravs, pile power—"

"Armaments, man! What's she got for **beef?**"

I don't like that one-eyed stare of his! And how does he read a radalax with only one eye?

"Ha! Hydro-bombs, 'ruptors, heat—"

"Yeah, yeah. But how many chutes and what's the rating?"

"Six, port and starboard—and three million kilos . . . "

What they trying to do — bust

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her seams? That is some soup for this class of rig.

"Must make the Geigers sing when you're playing for keeps."

"Nope—screen insulation . . ."

Hmm. The only thing modern they've got . . .

"Well, let's go see the men."

"Aye, aye, **Captain** . . ."

* * *

TWELVE drifters. Look at them! Off-scourings of the Belt if I ever saw one space tramp. They'd never have reached the Belt, though, if they didn't know a Dopplerscope from a peep show. That one's Johnny Kaye. He knows I got broke from Solar for drinking. Well, they're **all** juggers. But what **they** got to drink about? They're just running away from things they could go back and face. There's nothing for me to go back to. Madge is dead . . .

"All right, men—pull in your guts and look alive. This is Captain Price."

"I want their names . . ."

"Sound off!"

"Williams!" "Hamilton!" "Dehler!"

So my uniform is clean, pressed, and tailor made. They don't like rank. They hate me already. Maybe that's the way I like it.

"Kelly!" "Malone!" "Saugstad!"

I can read that big bruiser's mind right now. He thinks he can lick me and he's going to watch his chance to try it. That's Saugstad. I'll remember him!

"Syfert!" "Swartz!" "Lescalzo!"

Lousy Mex: Make him a swobblie.

"Dodson!" "Malenckowitz!" "Kaye!"

Johnny's lost weight — and been crippled in that left leg. What good's a limper on a runner? He's a tobacco bug, too. Fingers yellow as . . .

"All right, men. At ease." Throw them off their guard. Poker face, now. Don't let 'em figure you out. Look 'em over. Now glare 'em down and give 'em hell! "From the looks of you—you're all from the Belt. I don't know why you've come out here to work the Ring, and I don't give a hang—as long as whatever it is don't interfere with your work. I see you don't think much of this uniform. Well, there're two reasons for it and I want you to get them into your thick skulls right now . . . One is for rank. You may not like rank, but it's a system—there've got to be rules and authority and I'll break the first man who thinks different. I'm Captain. Furgeson here is First Mate. **You** take orders from **us.** It might even be interesting to the rest of you men for one of you to try and see what happens when you don't obey that rule. The other reason for this uniform is neatness. A ship can't run efficiently if its crew is a bunch of slobs, which you are. You're going to clean up, and you're going to keep this ship clean. Just now, it stinks!"

Look at 'em strain to hold their tempers! Saugstad looks like he's going to shoot his mouth off—

"Pardon me, **Captain,** but this ship—"

"Shut up! You'll talk when **I** ask you to." I'll break him down yet! Look at him fume! "Now let's get down to business. How many men are new here?" Seven greenhorns. That gives me five good runners and Furgeson to show me the Ring. "All right, then here's the brief. The Madison Company has now become the Madison Corporation. We're refinanced and new supplies and equipment is coming in. There's a barge train en route now loaded with oxygen enough to last this station a good year, which should put us on an even footing with Titan. You greenies may not know it, but Titan Company's monopoly

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in this region is based on the fact they can manufacture their own oxygen right on Titan. This satellite, Rhea, hasn't got the material for it. But we're big enough outfit now and we've got the guts enough to dare to set up station inside the orbit of Titan. That puts us closer to the Ring, but also puts us in close contact with our chief competitors, who are a cut-throat pack of pirates, as you all know. They think they own this Saturn system and we're going to run metal right out from under their noses. We're also going to work the Inner Ring—"

"The **Inner** Ring!"

"Shut up, Kaye! I said—the Inner Ring. I know it's fast and dangerous but thonon metal has been discovered by the Titan gang in the Inner Ring, and that drags down ten times the price of anything else. Now here's the proposition. Madison corporation will give us a half share—in other words—fifty percent—of the take every time we run for thonon metal . . ."

Half of them look yellow. Look at 'em sweat! They're thinking about high G pullouts and turns. "What have you got to lose? You joined this foreign legion because there was nothing left. Now here's a chance for some cash. Am I to assume you haven't got guts enough to compete with Titan Company's runners? **They** work the Inner Ring . . .

Look at Johnny Kaye raising his hand. He's seen me break men before.

"Kaye, you have a question . . .

"That oxygen, Sir . . . If we're going to have plenty—"

"I know what you're getting at, and the answer is no. Smoking on board is still out. You'll stick to snuff and chewing—and the first man I catch spitting anywhere but in the disposal pots will be swobbie for a week, with no hiber. And that brings us to the real reason for the extra oxygen. This is my own ruling, and Madison agreed. You're not going to fatten your fannies lying in hibersleep two thirds of each trip. I want six men on deck at all times . . ."

If I ever saw mutiny staring me in the face . . . well, now's the time to stop it. Oh! Oh! Here goes Saugstad!

"Captain Price—hibersleep is the only thing makes a man able to stand the gaff when he's on duty. This ship's one hundred percent cyber—runs itself. Six men on deck at a time would get bored looking at each other, and that's a waste of oxygen when we could be using it for smokes. Titan Company."

"Saugstad! Will you step forward?" I'm gonna deck him.

There! His jaw's a lump of granite. Look at him, comin' up for more! Well, he's asking for the double hook treatment—

His jaw hurts my fists, and that's something new. But he's out. **No,** he's coming to already! Well, I'll jerk him to his feet—light grav makes it look good, snapping up a two hundred thirty pounder . . .

"Now listen, Saugstad, and all the rest of you. You may be thinking of a lousy smoke, but I'm thinking of your grimy **necks!** I said we're refinanced and we're going into the Inner Ring. That means Titan Company's going to be after us. We're inside their orbit, and a three man deck watch isn't enough under the circumstances. I'm glad Saugstad provided an example of what **not** to do around here. I'm giving the orders—so don't argue. I want you to get used to my rank. It may save your lives sometime if you do what you're told and don't argue before **or** afterward . . ."

They hate me all right, but it's a

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healthier hate now. They know I can lick every one of them. (Haven't tried this Furgeson, though. Fat over gristle is like a screen block).

"All right, now here's orders! We're clearing the station in one hour. Warm up the pile, check all main cyber relays and weapon blocks. Get ready for a straight, fast run, and Furgeson here will give you the hiber schedule for six **men** only. When we're under way, the six man deck watch will rotate hands to clean this garbage scow up—and themselves, too. I'll dock credits from every man who insists on being a slob. There's hydro-spray on this tub. Wash some of that stink off of you. Now get to your stations and prepare for navigation!"

Madge made me hate sweat. She was always clean as moonlight—guess a clean smell was a part of her passion . . .

"No questions now, men. You've got your order, so on the double!"

"You want to look over the ship schematics and see the course charts, Captain?"

"Yes, Furgeson. Let's dig into it . . ."

* * *

YOU think a ship like this is big on the ground, but what's two hundred feet of hull and eight thousand tons of metal out here in the Big Ditch almost eight hundred million miles from Earth? A hopped-up meteor wired for trouble—barreling along through nothing at half a thousand miles a second—and for what? To scrounge out some metal that Triplanetary thinks it's got to have back in the Inner System, so's it can protect the System against the guys who think they ought to fight the System for the privilege of protecting it against the guys they just beat, at the cost of millions of tons of ships, lives dedicated to brain-work, and buckets of blood of the mothers' sons who were raised to run that rat race as a career, for honor or something.

And where's life in the meantime—even for the guys back there who could have something to live for? I mean living for just themselves—the kind Madge insisted on—the kind that sounds easy but is too far buried under all the complications they all set in their way.

What was that poetry she used to write about us?—Or blank verse, I guess it was—

Our world is a motor ride to the sea, the two of us not saying much, just riding, we, attuned in harmony to the subjectivity of sweet escape, from everyone and everything, alone in our togetherness, our faces drinking wind and sun and miles of beach and sweeping, open road, along the outward reaching everness of sea and soul-reviving far expanding sky. Just you and I beside each other lying on the sand beneath the salted wind—

What am I doing alive, Madge? Why am I no stronger than these others out here, asking for Hell before our time, simply because we're robots with a built-in self-preservation circuit? Why did we have to learn as much about life—**real** deep down underneath life—if it had to be cut off?

If only I could look at another woman. But who could answer life like you—like us together?—

And both of us become as gods who ride the racing storm of love's emotion, and finally unleash the lightning bolt that brings it to an end. And peace conceived by Heaven floods its way across the storm-drenched meadows of the soul, like dawn before the cry of birds has met the sun—

Oh my God! Madge! Madge! **"Madge!"**

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"Hey Price! If you'd try hibersleep instead of catnaps you wouldn't have nightmares . . ."

Who is that? "Furgeson? Leave me alone! I wasn't having a nightmare . . ."

"Well, you're always hollering her name like she scared you to death—"

Damn him!

"Take it easy—"

"Get your hand off my arm or I'll dim your other eye!"

"Don't you go talking about eyes—that's why **I'm** out here. Say—you been drinkin', Captain!"

"So what if I have? You keep shut about it!"

"Hell I will. What are you made of, stone or slime? What the men can't have the skipper shouldn't be gettin'. Wouldn't surprise me if you—Hey! Look at that! Ashes in your drink glass. You been smokin' in here, too!"

"Listen, Horseface, what the men do or don't get to do is one thing—"

"Look, Price! You're not going to—Hey! Hit **me**, will you?"

Okay, he asked for it—Hit the deck, you lousy—

* * *

Am I coming out of hibersleep, or—Good night! He knocked me out. "Why you—!"

"Take it easy, Price. Let's forget all about it. Tell you what. We'll share one drink together and then throw your jug overboard . . ."

So now it's buddy-buddy is it? He hasn't seen the last of this yet.

"You know—hey! This is hundred proof, old-fashioned Scotch!"

"Been keeping it for years. You're not throwing it overboard, either."

"Hell no! We might need it to pay somebody's ransom! But here now. Take this. You know—yeah—mud in your eye! You know, you're no more better than the rest of us, 'cause we all got our reasons for being here. Take my eye, for instance. I studied for years to get somewhere. Solar Patrol was my meat—top grades and honors. You know what I mean. You're ex Space Navy—Annapolis and all that. But what happens when I'm ready for a commission? Accident in my own apartment. Glass in my eye. Not a heroic battle scar that saved a couple planets mind you. Just a simple, numb-brain accident at home. Without two eyes no Solar Patrol. After twelve years! So here I am waitin' to die like the rest of you. You been hollerin' about a woman. Okay! Okay! Don't ruffle up! It's your business—and lots of times it's beautiful and it's sad. It twists your guts like you was run over by a mono-train. Hooks and hot lead in the old solar plexus. Don't tell me! That's another thing I lost when I lost my eye. As I say, we're all bitter out here. We're not workin' for money except maybe to blow it on liquor and dames when we're back at station. We're just fighting off suicide. That's all. We may be bitter—but we're human beings. You know what **you** are? You're just a machine. No flesh and blood. This ship is more human than you are. And that's a worse kind of hell than a man should ask for—"

"When I want a lecture I'll ask for it. You put that jug back in my locker and close the door. What I want to know is—how come you're a first mate with one eye? How do you work a radalax?"

"Don't have to. This is the only ship in the Solar System I can work. Cyber does it all. We got a Malernik-Schweize cyber-control, which is the best—but little old Johnny Kaye is a cyber wizard and added a few circuits of his own. This ship **thinks** by itself. And that's why we're kind of in love with her. There's another thing. Men gotta have something to

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live for. They like this ship and you don't. It'd mean a lot to morale if you'd shut up about her."

"Confidentially—she doesn't send me . . .!"

"You're just no good!"

There! I decked him that time and he's not getting up—for a while, anyway . . .

* * *

Does my lover still remember
How he found my heart an ember
Way down in Clarketown station?
It was the coolest on the planet
Till he came along to fan it
Into a conflagration—oh!—

Who turned that off? "Hey listen, Kaye! Get your hands off that spool. **I** was playing it—"

"But Price! That's the Clarketown Blues. Among us guys it's taboo. Didn't you know about Malone?"

Look at Malone over there—and Saugstad! Both look like they could throw that chessboard at me. "No I didn't know about Malone and if it's another case of 'Dear John' so what? This outfit'd be more in shape if it could forget the past we left behind us—" Isn't **that** a lie!

My lover's been a riddle
From the time I up an' kissed 'im
Way out there in the middle
Of the cockeyed Solar System—

"All right, Malone! If you don't like it—" Hey, the guy's crying or something!

"What kind of a man are you, Price? Sure I turned it off when you were listening to it and sure you can deck me, you with your big beef and a rock for a heart. Go ahead!"

In a minute the guy'll be frothing at the mouth. Never saw such a—

"It ain't the record as much as it's you that gets me down. You don't understand anybody including your own self! Because you don't try and you don't care! If you gotta be ornery go do it somewhere else but in the recreation room. Beat yourself to death but don't take it out on us! Think you're the only guy in the universe ever lost something worth while?"

Oh! Oh! Here comes Saugstad!

"Price, one of these days—"

Bzzz . . .

Call to stations! "All right men—skip it! We're close to the Ring. What did you say, Kaye?"

"Nothing. Come on, Malone, we gotta watch those interlock relays—"

Hell you didn't! **I** know what you said!

* * *

LOOK at that ball of gas—seventy-thousand miles of nothing! If Saturn never had a ring we wouldn't be here. Oh! Oh!—this is a stiff turn she's going into—two or, three—Cyber-brain's pretty good at that, feeding itself its own coordinates. Look at that Inner Ring line up with course!

"Hey—Furgy! Better make sure—we're matching velocity here. Small percentage error is bad at our speed. This Inner Ring's doing a thousand miles per second." Look at Horseface sweat under these Gs! Wait'll I show them what a **man** can take! Wait'll cybernalysis comes up with a chunk of stuff worth tackling.

"Don't—worry! This baby's got all the—answers!"

"You **hope!**"

First time I ever had a close look at the Inner Ring—five thousand miles wide and almost five hundred thousand miles around. Most of it's dust, but there's about ten percent boulders . . .

* * *

"We been out here a week now and only picked up three lousy tons of low percentage ore. If your cybernalysis is so fool proof, then this big chunk up ahead is what we're

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looking for."

"But it's erratic as hell, Price! Keeps diving down into the Ring and popping out in the damnedest places! It's dangerous to play tag with that one!"

"Want to know the real trouble? You're all yellow!"

"You gotta observe safety factors. This ship is not expendable even if you think the men are!"

"We won't risk the ship—**or** the men. I just want to cut these turns shorter—get in and get out quicker next time that chunk shows . . ."

"But three Gs is max!"

"You mean Kaye cut in a governor on cyber—to spare your guts—all of you! She can't coordinate closer as long as that factor limits the course-calc. **Kaye!**— cut out that acceleration block on your cyber!"

"You mean—put her on manual?"

"Yes! **I'll** radalax. Let's grab that chunk and get out of here! Longer we stay here the more time Titan's got to spot us. When they know we're running thonon—"

"But the men can't take—"

"Obey orders, Kaye! I said manual!"

"Aye! Aye! **Captain! Take it** away!"

"Hey Price! I been through Solar Academy —you forgotten the medic sections of the flight manual?"

"Don't Academy me, Furgeson! Just button up your girdle! That was written for computation beamers—not for **this** legion of the damned! Lock in that speed-match and watch for that big hunk—"

Telling **me** about the flight manual! I could quote the thing by heart—

Manual control and dependence upon visual stimuli at accelerations above three G is wholly inadvisable because the vestibular and kinesthetic portion of the orientation triad may furnish false information. The dangers of cortical anoxia —

To hell with the manual. I haven't ever blacked out yet—"Look! There she is! Grab your guts, we're going in!"

Intercom shoulda been turned off: Who's that screaming? This is only four Gs . . . Can't talk—ton of lead. Damn this radalax—fogging up . . . Ship better coordinate right with the magnatrac—

Bzzzz—

There, it's hooked!—"

"Look out!—Too close, Price!—"

Can't be my eyes—but going into Ring. Pull out, blast you—pull out! Five—Gs. Wish that guy'd quit screaming. Vision's black . . .

* * *

"Well what was he doing on board if he had a hernia? It's not my fault—"

"Nothing's your fault, Price. Remember? You're a machine. And Loscalzo is dead. Hope you're happy knowing you killed him for a half a ton of sky rock that may not assay worth a cent—"

"But if he had a hernia —"

"It was a little one well healed since years ago, and as long as Kaye's acceleration governor was hooked in he was okay. Sure I passed him in. He couldn't make a living anywhere else. He's wanted in the Inner System on a framed up manslaughter charge that was self defense. He was a good boy—"

"All right! I didn't know about it, and what's more he's better off dead! We got metal to run, and how come that rock's gonna assay poor when your miracle ship indicated—"

"Price, someday you're not going to like the way you're going to die!"

"You threatening me?"

"Why not?"

* * *

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"Stow that, Kaye, we got enough to worry about without getting superstitious!"

"But it's a new way of looking at it! Funny the way Loscalzo said it just before he died—Heaven is close to Earth. You die out in space and you're a ghost, wandering around in nowhere, looking for Heaven —"

Madge died out in space—Venusian fever. Couldn't get her back to Earth in time. Space burial. Would to God she were a ghost out here! If I could only— "Leave me alone, Kaye!"

* * *

MADISON PROSPECTING CORP.
Rhea Station, Saturn System
codabeam- RHE
codatape- STN

Ref: Thonon October 23, 2072

Captain Wm. H. Price,
Spaceship 5,
Station

Dear Price:

Your run is better than we expected, but your ship's log is reading more and more rugged. Bad crew morale. Rough treatment. Three deaths. And now these scrapes with Titan.

Since we installed the superdrive in Number 5 you have been under instructions to outrun Titan hijackers. The grapevine tells us they're packed for bear, so don't risk a ship, a crew and an ore load of thonon to outfight them.

One more good run for Number 5 and you and the crew are slated for a month on station. Let your men know this. Try to get them to work **with** you. We know you're a good skipper. Let **them** know it.

Signed: **W. L. Gidney (Will)**
Vice-Pres.-Operations

WLG-ms
cc: Exec. Mgr.
File

* * *

"Well, Price, I hope you're happy again. Last time you decided to play hero it cost two lives. Now you decide to swap broadsides with a Titan runner twice our size and we're crippled! We can't repair that power leak to the cyclotubes soon enough to get up speed enough to outrun them. They're gonna catch us, Price, and you know —"

"Don't blame our luck on me. I tried to be nice to you guys and leave that acceleration governor of Kaye's locked in. At three Gs max we couldn't maneuver like we should have. If I'd have had it my way we'd have hi - jacked them."

"So what! We got the biggest haul yet and you weren't satisfied —"

"I'm lookin' for a bonus for **us**, man —"

"And curtains, too!"

"No. There's something more important. I wanted to convince the company Titan's gang isn't invulnerable. If we could knock off a couple of their ships the day might come when Madison Corporation would dare to pull a raid on Titan. If we had that satellite for a station we'd all have oxygen to burn — smokes, women for the men, a permanent base that nobody could take —"

"That's great! But I've got news for you. That Titan ship is on our tail **now**, and we're limping. They've got much more power — enough to break our screen blocks — and you ought to know how they hijack. Deathray! We'll all be ghosts wandering around in nowhere, like Loscalzo said when he died!"

"Well, if Heaven's hard to find out here, Hell should be, too. So what have **you** got to worry about, Ferguson?"

"You kidding around at a time like this!"

"No, and maybe if you'd shut your mouth you'd learn something. Ever been on Mimas before?"

"The inner moon? No."

"Ever read the survey reports on

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it?"

"Just a few facts — three hundred and some miles in diameter — about a hundred and fifteen thousand miles from primary — Say! We're close to Mimas now!"

"Right. I've had Kaye feed extra coordinates to cyber. We're locking orbits with Mimas any minute now."

"But what good's that gonna do! That Titan ship —"

"I said button your trap and listen. The survey reports indicated that Mimas is one big honeycomb, natural tunnels and caves clear through her cold, dead core. We can park on the surface and they'll think we're grounded for repairs. They'll deathray us. But we won't be there. We'll be way down inside and shielded by a couple miles of ferrous rock."

"But they'll hi-jack our load **and** the ship!"

"Malone rigged the airlock. She'll be a booby trap when they come on board. Two minutes after they've entered, supersonics inside here will tear their guts out and scramble their brain cells. In the meantime, cyber will be laying for their ship with all chutes bomb-loaded for an automatic broadside. When they're knocked-out, we come back, make repairs, and maybe even pick up what's left of their own load of thonon. Now — what do you think of that?"

"Well, you couldn't do it if you didn't have this special baby to work with. If that plan works, you ought to kiss the hull and let us take your picture. And as long as you've got to be ornery why don't you concentrate it on the opposition all the time like this instead of taking it out on your own crew?"

"Fergy, I've got a couple more jugs of Scotch. Want a slug before we get into space suits?"

"By gum, yes!"

* * *

"Well, we been down under the surface of this black rock for two hours. That ought to be time enough. Here come Syfert and Malenckowitz now. What gives, Syfert?"

"We did it! There's three dead guys inside the ship and the Titan job is a string of junk drifting in all over Mimas!"

"Okay, then what are we waiting for? Let's go!"

"Yeah, I've had enough of these lousy caves and tunnels down here. Gimme an eyeful of stars again."

"We gotta look at the pile first. Had to ditch ship in a hurry, but last time I looked at the indicators it looked like she was building up out of control."

"Why didn't you tell us sooner! On the double, you guys!"

* * *

"Hey! Cut transmission and duck!"

Of all the lousy luck! There's another Titan ship, big as the other one, looking us over. There'll be blood in their eye. If they don't blast this whole moon —

"Ahoy, Madison! Titan to Madison, over!"

Go jump, you slobs! Not gonna answer.

"We know you're down there hiding out. looks like you've got something special coming to you for the nice little job you just pulled."

"Hey Price! Look!"

"I said cut transmission!"

"That's right, Madison! Or Price. If that's Captain Price, of famous Number Five, then this ought to be real special, to even a couple of scores. We're taking your ship in tow, and you can think about all the nice oxygen we manufacture on Titan. Hope you corpses like Mimas for a permanent base!"

"This is Price talking. You can't leave us stranded here. We only got

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a couple hours' oxygen left."

"Funny you say we can't, Price. We're doing it! Also leaving a carton of cigarettes so's you can look at them and think of us. Ha! Ha!"

"Hey, Titan!"

"Shut up, Malone! I said —"

"Nuts to you, Price —"

"Damn you, I'll —"

"Hey Titan, to hell with Price and Madison. Pick us up and we'll work with you!"

"Don't leave us here to die!"

"Titan, for the love of God!"

"Parting is such sweet sorrow. Au revoir. That is all!"

"They can't do it!"

"Don't leave us here!"

* * *

"All I can say is I hope that power pile waits till they get to Titan before it blows. ."

"All you can say is a bunch of hot air! You got us into this, Price!"

"Say what you want, Fergy. What difference does it make? In one more hour —" I think some of these men will go nuts before they smother. Look at Dodson pulling on Kaye.

"Johnny, can't you work up some extra power pack — send a beamed call to Rhea?"

"So what if I could? Take me more time to figure it out than we got air. Rhea's a couple hundred thousand miles away. They couldn't come for us in time."

"Price! Aren't there any other ships in this region?"

"Nope. Two and four are in for repairs. Number one's just docking, and three is working the Inner Ring. All out of reach."

"Then maybe some other Titan ship —!"

"Ha!"

"But we can't just wait around to die!"

"Listen, you men, before we all go nuts maybe we ought to use our heads just one last time. That's not a bad idea about Kaye rigging a special power pack and beaming a message. The Ring's closer than Rhea. Might be able to pick up Number Three down there —"

"But Kaye said —"

"Shut up, Saugstad, lemme finish. I know Kaye said there's not enough time. But there would be — for him and maybe two others — if we drew lots and pooled our air —"

"An' what happens to the rest of us?"

"Same thing that'll happen anyway if we don't try what I said. ."

"Either we all get out a this or we all die. ."

"Hell with you, Hamilton. I say the Old Man is right!"

Saugstad's stirring his feeble brain. What he says the men follow.

"I think that's fair you guys. Three would have a chance — two besides Kaye, who knows about the radio. I say we draw lots, what do you say, Fergy?"

"What else is there? No straws on Mimas, but we can put a bunch of equal size stones in a hole and mark 'em some way. ."

"All right, men, let's set it up and get going."

"Aye! Aye! Captain!"

Said that like they meant it. Maybe they think it's a good way to get rid of me sooner. Well, so what! Might as well be a ghost — like Loscalzo — and Madge . . .

* * *

So it's Kaye, Syfert and Malenckowitz. Well, it was a fair draw. Now they've each got three hours and we've got fifteen minutes.

"How you doing, Kaye?"

"No trick to add on all you guys' power packs, but the question is how much load can the outputs take? I can't wire in extra circuits with my mitts on and no tools or condensers. Probably send out a

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blast of distortion."

"So you don't have to talk. Just so you make noise to reach far enough you can code work it."

"Hey Price! What if they did pick up Number Three? Could it get here in time?"

"Maybe."

"Nobody's gonna come anyway!"

"Shut up, Dodson."

"Don't worry, I'll be still in a few more minutes, and so will **you** — forever!"

Forever. That's what Madge used to say. She and I — forever. Well, Madge darling, maybe your wish is going to come true.

"I wanna live! Gimme that air!"

"Saugstad! You lay off Malenckowitz!" I'll crack his face plate!

"Hold it, you guys! Look!"

Who said that? Sounded like Ferguson.

"Yeah — look! Look! It's a ship comin' for us!"

"Hey! That's Number Five — our own ship!" Does that ship look good!

"But who's on board?"

"Ahoy! Madison — Number Five!" No answer. What is this? "Watch it, men. May be a trick!"

"Look! It's landing!"

* * *

"I got the creeps, Price! We been all over her and there's nobody on board!"

"How about that power pile?"

"Kaye and Malone got it tamed down. It's gonna be under control. But what you make of it? Hey Syfert — Malenckowitz! What's your idea? We can't figure this out."

"Well — if you ask me, the ship's haunted. ."

"What d'you mean? Talk sense!"

"Sure! Syfert's talkin' sense! How else could this ship turn around and come back? There ain't no way of setting her controls to make her come back here and make a nice landing like that . . ."

That's right. How else can you explain it? She came back on her own just like she could think.

"What do you think, Price? Ever heard of anything like this before?"

"Huh? I don't know. We picked up extra ore from that Titan wreckage — we're headed in to station for a month's vacation. Let it go at that."

* * *

"Price, you gonna sit in here in your cabin and drink up all that Scotch by yourself? You goin' nuts after it's all over? You been talkin' to yourself for hours — and are you stinko!"

"Get outta here, Horse face! Take those other two jugs and give all hands a ration. Get out!"

"But I tell you you gotta get hold of yourself!"

"Get out! Get out!"

"Okay! Okay! But if you keep up that mumbling —"

"Get OUT!"

* * *

Madge? Is that you, Madge—running this ship? You did it, didn't you Madge? You found me, after all this time — way out here. We're together again, baby. Just you and I. . . .

"Hey Price! I think I have the answer —"

"Get out of here and leave me alone!"

"Brother! Are you stinko! But I found out what happened and it's really one for the books!"

"All right. What happened?" He only **thinks** he knows — but we know the real answer, don't we Madge?

"Well, you know this cybernetic brain we've got is extra special. It was almost human in the first place, but it took an injury to really throw it into high gear."

"What d'you mean?"

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"I mean a circuit combination took place that nobody'd ever thought of before. It's slipped back to normal and we'll never know quite what it was — but while it was in that condition the one missing factor was provided to make the brain think by itself."

"Baloney! How can a machine think by itself?"

"Well, what's the basic difference between the finest machine a man can make — and a human being?"

Fergy always said I was a machine. "**What** missing factor?"

"Desire. . You gotta **want** something in order to strive for a goal."

I wanted Madge, but when she died, I wanted nothing. So I was a machine. No desire. But now Madge is back. She's here on board with me. She saved my life. . I was going to die out there — suffocate on an airless moon. . . .

"You see, that unknown circuit combination made the brain want to live. Desire was the basis of its consciousness."

"It's a lie. This ship —"

"No! Figure it out! Given a desire to live, take it from there. The brain figures out the pile is going to blow. It isn't hooked up right to control it. Who can save its life? **We** can. It couldn't communicate with the crew on board the Titan ship. But it knew we would board ship if it came back to Mimas. So when they weren't expecting it, the Titan gang got a shot of deathray, and this ship turned back for us, to get its pile fixed. . . "

"Kaye, of all the screwy —"

"Well, that's better than the supernatural explanation about ghosts —"

"Shut up!"

"What's eating you? What you comin' at me for?"

"You're a liar! It was Madge took this ship over!"

"You're insane! Stay away from me, Price!"

"What'd you smash that whiskey bottle for?"

"Stay away from me or I'll shove it in your face, Price!"

"You're a liar, Kaye! That brain didn't think — it was Madge took over the ship!"

"Price! Don't —"

* * *

"Well, Price, I suppose you been wonderin' why I saved your skin at the trial."

"No, Ferguson. I just want to be left alone. You're going back to Earth and I'm stayin' right here on this ship till I die. Probably won't be any natural death, either. Now let it go at that."

"All right. I'll tell you anyway. I testified Kaye went nuts and came at you, so it was self defense. I'd like you to know why I did it. You see, he gave me his explanation of what the cyber-brain did, back there on Mimas. The difference he drew between a machine and a human being was — desire. You gotta want something before you're motivated. Well, that put me to thinking. I never did tell you the real story behind this bum eye of mine. It was glass, all right, but a broken whiskey bottle, just like Kaye was about to give you. Had a fight with a guy I caught with my wife when I came home from a cancelled flight. She's tried for five years to get me back. Asked for forgiveness and all that. I was bitter — all the desire in me burned out. But Kaye is right. If you establish the basis for living, that's what you're doing. You're living. Okay, so I tried putting back a desire — desire for home. It works. I want it all back. And I'm **going** back. But now take your case. When your woman went, your desire went. You were nothing but a machine. You're

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a changed man now. Look just as hard at all the new greenies that come in, but underneath you're human. I don't know what you found but you found something. You didn't murder Kaye. You were out of your head. Thought I might as well salvage you and see if what you found would keep you going. Evidently it did."

"Yeah."

"Only one thing. Don't burn yourself out on that whiskey."

"Go on — beat it, Furgy!"

"Okay — but I'm glad you like this ship now. Maybe that's the secret. You've taken a liking to the old girl. It even smells good in here — outside of that whiskey breath of yours. Well, take good care of her, Price. So long!"

"Yeah: Huh? So long, Furgy — and thanks."

* * *

"All right, men. At ease." throw them off their guard. Poker face, now. Don't let 'em figure you out. Now, glare 'em down and give 'em hell! "From the looks of you — you're all from the Belt. . . . . ."

"And another thing. . I'll dock credits from every man who insists on being a slob. There's hydrospray on this ship. Wash some of that stink off of you! This is a good, clean ship and I even want it to smell good. Now get to your stations and prepare for navigation!"

* * *

Just you and I, Madge — together. We'll run metal out here until — until my number comes up. And one way or the other, we'll always be together, won't we? Talk to me, Madge. I like to hear your voice —

—the two of us not saying much, just riding, we attuned in harmony to the subjectivity of sweet escape, from everyone and everything, alone in our togetherness. —

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SCIENTIFILM SEARCHLIGHT

A Guide To What's Good In Sci-Fi Movies

By Forrest J. Ackerman

Mr. Ackerman, or as he is better known, Mr. Science Fiction, is an expert Hollywood sci-fi consultant, and is certainly America's best informed movie columnist in this field.

SCIENCE? Scarcely. Fiction? Who can say. I wasn't there at the time, even tho Robert Bloch has biographed me as "the only fan who never stepped up and asked Methuselah for his autograph." And if Egyptologist L. Sprague de Camp wishes to claim that the pyramids were actually the first outdoor sand-'em-ascope screens in 4-D (four directions), and that he has uncovered a review of **Frankenstein Meets Rameses** that begins "Pharoah J. Ankherman slept here . . .', well, who am I to say these eminent historians nay?

Suffice it to say that I say yea to THE TEN COMMANDMENTS and order all those who read this column to see it before another issue of OTHER WORLDS is on the stands. If you do not enjoy it ("The Ten Commandments", not **Other Worlds**) send me your ticket stub and the price of admission and I will go see it again myself.

Up to intermission time (the projection time of approximately 3 hrs. 39 mins. is broken by a refreshment period a little beyond midway in the movie) the stage has simply been set for the miracles; it is in the latter half that all Heaven breaks loose. Rods turn into reptiles . . . the Nile runs red with blood . . . a noxious green fog creeps lethally even into the bedchamber of the son of Egypt . . . fire falls from the sky . . . God manifests himself as a flaming pillar of vocal energy . . . and - - most wondrous of all - - the Red Sea parts.

We keen for the sixth sense - - the lost Sense of Wonder. I have never forgotten how, as a **tenager** in '26, DeMille early opened my eyes

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A scene from "The Mole People", a Universal-International Picture, starring John Agar and Cynthia Patrick.

to wonder as he opened the Red Sea in the silent version of "The Ten Commandments". (Come to think of it, there was sound even then: the gasps of the amazed audience.) Thirty years later I feared I might not be so child-eyed and naive. But I take off my toupee to the cinemiracle-makers, for when the Red Sea parted **this** time round, my hair stood on end and I just about drowned in a cold sweat. A spectacle of the first water.

The eleventh commandment is: Don't miss the **BIG TEN.**

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* * *

Two good numbers are "1984" and "April 1, 2000." The latter is a Viennese import that's finally worked its way to the USA a couple years after its first release abroad. It's a broad comedy about occupational forces and farces at the turn of the next century, combining humorous situations with eye-appeal, of which there is a good deal in the form of World Peace Police Rockets, a gyrogondola stratoship, and robotically clad minions of the international law, armed with what they termed (as I recall) "hades-throwers". If that cavilling, carping, cadaverous crowd of cinema critics fanonymous, the **LASFS**, by and large enjoyed the Germantics of

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"April 1, 2000", I see no reason you shouldn't too. But in case you take my word for it, spend your money, and don't mail in your half theatre ticket and I'll replace it with a ticket to Vienna. Half way, and good only on April 1, 2000, of course.

Of the two dates, I would rather live in the 21st century of the aforementioned funny film than the about to be mentioned frightening one, altho "1984" (rating EXCELLENT) is by far the more interesting picture. Here is the Slave New World of glass houses and the Seeing Eye that dogs its dog-tagged citizens night and day, searching them from head to soul. If the Thought Police don't get you, the juvenile informants will. Your own dreams may betray you if you talk in your sleep. You must hate instead of love—except that above all you must love BIG BROTHER. I would have prefered other actors in the roles of Romeo-&-Juliet Edmond O'brien and Jan Sterling, but whether a natural like Claude Rains in the part of the Inquisitor could have been any more chilling than Michael Redgrave only my opposite number in the parallel world is in a position to know - - and my space-warper just went on the woof. Anyway: I found a good deal of the feel of the earlier future classic, THINGS TO COME, in this film; its environment is sufficiently real that, for better for worse, you are projected into it. Just don't forget to come back - - there are better things in this world to love than Big Brother.

THE MOLE PEOPLE (Good) is a hole of a picture. It begins with the big shaft, that leads to lost Sumeria; ends with the big shift that earthquakes the entranceway to Moletown out of existence. In between we've seen dancing girls (albeit albinos), mushroom - pickin' slave-moles (I don't notice any molls among em, but maybe it takes one to recognize one), an intrepid explorer and a brave hero, a beautiful maiden in distress (and dis dress was pretty diaphanous at times) and a preface authenticating the picture, which was shot in the actual locale. A critic like James Blish would insist that the script-writer should have been too, but then everybody knows that Jim subsists on carbolic cocktails with sulfuric acid chasers.

CURUCU, BEAST OF THE AMAZON (Good). Old campaigner Curt Siodmak both wrote and directed this one, and you can even catch a glimpse of Mr. Donovan's Brain Himself in this picture as he's the first one down the gangplank when the passenger plane touches down from the States. This picture is in color, is about a search for a cancer cure, has a believable heroine who gets wrapped up in the coils of the damndest snake fight I ever saw filmed, an a-to-zooful of jungle beasts, and a man-made monster.

MAN BEAST (Good) is a shaggy-man story about the Abominable Snow Creatures (the Yeti) who inhabit the snowbound domain of the Himalayas above the 21,000 ft. mark. Actual reports of these monsters have been recounted in **Fate, Mystic, Search, True, Argosy, Newsweek,** etc. One version has it that Bob Tucker needed the work and an old Ingagi suit was exhumed, but it really isn't a bad picture for the story it purports to tell. I particularly well liked the fifth generation snowman; I think you will too.

Celuloid Snips: Future installments of SCIENTIFILM SEARCHLIGHT will spotlight "X the Unknown", "The Land Unknown", "The Cyclops", "The Undead", "Voodoo Wo-

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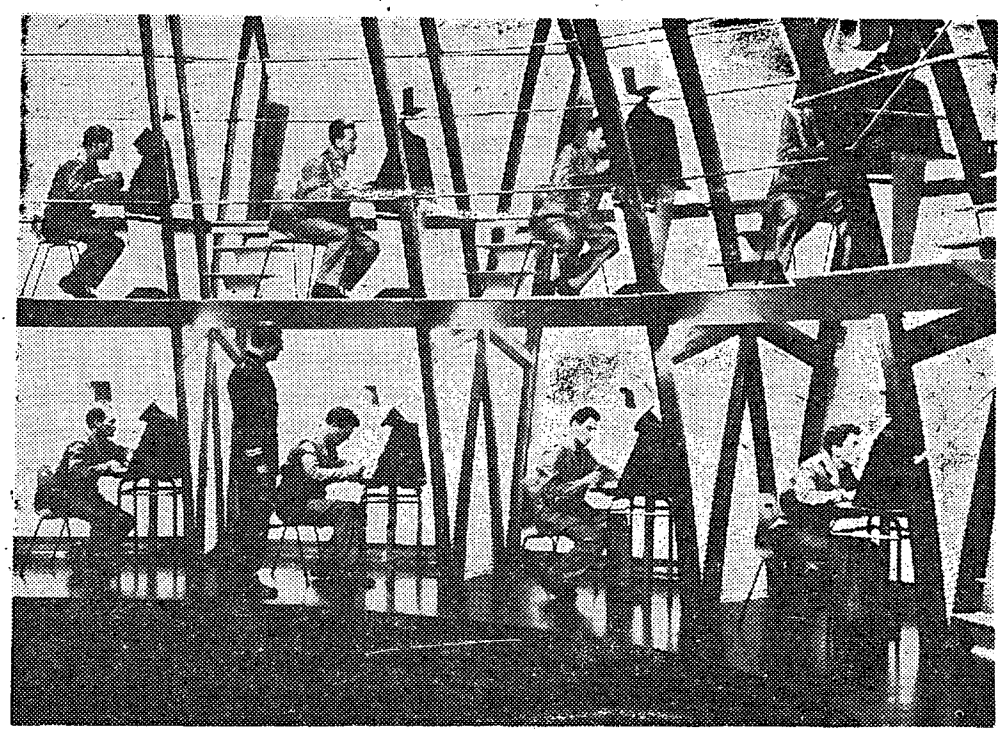

A scene from "1984", starring Edmond O'Brien, Michael Redgrave, Jan Sterling. A Holiday Production presented by Columbia Pictures. From the book by George Orwell.

man", "The Monster that Challenged the World", "The Incredible Shrinking Man", "Enemy from Space", "The Deadly Mantis", "20 Million Miles from Earth", "Not of This Earth", "I Was A Teenage Werewolf" and **The Beginning of** THE END.

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"There is still me to be considered," the girl said. "Would you shoot me too?"

"Could I see you in private for a few minutes, Dr. De Tatum?" Ross Neville asked. He had asked this question twice before and each time the tall man with the faint trace of yellow on his face, Jay Ekko, had intervened and asked another question before the famous scientist could answer. Neville wondered what would happen the third time he asked it. This time it was the young woman, Mary Blythe, who interferred.

"Your space creatures will make a wonderful story, Dr. De Tatum. Do tell us more about them."

The girl had violet eyes and a very good figure. She was a feature writer employed by the Planet Syndicate. Or so she had said. There was such a firm, Neville knew. It was engaged in making films of the various planets, sound recordings, and in producing and selling a general run of feature material designed to whet the jaded appetites of readers back on the home planet. Neville smiled and stepped unobtrusively away. **"I'll let this situation work itself along to a boil,"** he thought. He moved to the nearest plastic window. From this position, he could watch the girl, De Tatum, and Ekko, out of the corners of his eyes. He was quite sure the man with the faint trace of yellow on his face was watching him also although Ekko's bland countenance

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The De Tatum Effect

By

Robert Moore Williams

did not indicate that he was even aware of Ross Neville's existence. His gaze strayed through the plastic window of the big laboratory to what was beyond it, Pluto, space, and the cold. A shudder passed through him at the sight.

Men new to Pluto curse the cold, at first. Then they learn better than to risk cursing so potent a force and eventually they include in their prayers a plea to be protected, beyond all other things, from that frigidity which goes down toward absolute zero. He could hear De Tatum talking to the girl.

"My dear, there is no question that space is inhabited," the scientist was saying. He smiled at her, then glanced upward and his voice changed. "No, no, Ariel. Not now."

"I beg your pardon," the astonished girl said. "Were you speaking to me?"

"No, no," De Tatum answered. "To Ariel. From Shakespeare, you know. Ariel is very sensitive to contamination and asked permission to leave when Mr. Ekko came to see me. I told him there was no danger. Then when you arrived within a few minutes, and Mr. Neville came just a little later, Ariel was almost frantic. I just told him that none of you would be here very long and that he need not leave."

"I see," the girl said. The violet eyes widened, then closed. Whatever she was thinking, she was keeping it to herself. At the window, Ross Neville sighed silently and shifted his weight from one foot to the other. The movement produced a crinkling sound from his pocket, reminding him of what was there. He did not need to take the spacegram from his pocket to remind himself of its contents. He remembered them, even though they were in code.

HAVE INFORMATION THAT DE TATUM HAS MADE DISCOVERY OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE. ALSO HAVE INFORMATION SUNG AGENT IS TRYING TO CONTACT HIM. CONTACT DE TATUM AND OBTAIN DATA FROM HIM AT ONCE. REPEAT AT ONCE. OF URGENT IMPORTANCE.

The name signed to the spacegram was that of chief of staff of the military forces of the Union of Western Democracies.

"Sung agent?" Ross Neville thought. His eyes went from the face of Jay Ekko to that of the girl. He shook his head and resumed his scrutiny of the landscape outside. From this spot, he could see the big dome of Pluto Station, housing the large corps of research specialists that the Union of Western Democracies maintained here. The

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big dome was entirely separate from De Tatum's place and was about half a mile away. To go from one to the other, you had to put on a space suit and walk. This seemed to be one of the reasons why De Tatum had erected his own private dome. Certainly, with this arrangement, he would have few visitors. Three visitors at the same time must have startled him, but he was maintaining his composure. He was a tall man, with the narrow face of a dreamer, and a great shock of white hair.

"I think having an Ariel all your own is perfectly wonderful, Dr. De Tatum!" the girl said. "Do tell us more."

Was the enthusiasm in her voice real or was she putting on an act for purposes of her own? Neville did not know the answer to this question, yet he knew he might have to decide which it was, very quickly, and that the lives of several people might depend on the correctness of his decision. Several hunreds, several thousands, several millions? He did not know the answer to this, either. The number depended on what was real and what wasn't. How was a man to know which was which?

"Ariel doesn't belong to me," De Tatum answered, smiling. "He is just one of the smaller space creatures that I have succeeded in taming. They are very shy, you know. I'm sorry you can't see him without artifical aid but long training of the optic nerves is necessary to see Ariel with ordinary vision. Even after years of practice, I'm still not sure that I'm seeing him with some inner eye, some eye of the eye, as it were, instead of with my regular optics."

The girl seemed to drink this all in. "Then you really do believe that space is inhabited?"

"Believe it? My dear, I **know** it. This, among other reasons, induced me to set up my laboratory here on Pluto. I came here so I could be as near the vastness of space as possible and also so I could be as far away from the contamination of the planets as a human can get. The Vast Space out there," he gestured toward the roof of the dome, "— is thronged with uncounted millions of living creatures." The smile on his face was almost a glow.

At the window which looked out on this Vast Space, in which even the brilliant suns seemed to burn with a cold light, Ross Neville was silent. It was hard to remember that this was the man who, years before, had discovered what was called the De Tatum Effect and had invented what became known as the De Tatum gun.

Back on Earth, or in that part of it under the legal jurisdiction of the Union of Western Democracies, both the De Tatum Effect and the weapon built around it were outlawed for private use. Nobody but a bare half dozen of the world's top scientists had ever pretended they understood how the Effect operated. If you took a telescope and looked at a wall, you would see the wall. If you used the telescope built into the De Tatum Effect, you would not see the wall at all, but would see what was on the other side of it.

Along this path to the other side of the wall, it was possible to project a beam of negative energy. Thus a soldier in a foxhole could not only see his enemy hidden out of sight in another foxhole but could also destroy him. A gunner in a submarine could locate and destroy the crew or operating equipment of an

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enemy submarine. A spy outside a vital government building could stay there in perfect safety until he had located key officials inside the building.

No device as yet discovered could detect the effect and no shield could deflect or stop it.

In offering the effect and the weapon to the world, De Tatum had expressed the sincere hope that it would make warfare too hideous to be conceived by a civilized mind. His invention had not worked out that way. Warfare had become a devious and desperate skirmishing for position in which no nation and no combination of nations dared risk precipitating an open struggle until it was certain it held all the key cards and could destroy the enemy in one sudden, unexpected blow. Otherwise, the enemy would certainly retaliate.

Another result had been a tremendous increase in the number of secret service agents, each engaged in trying to find out what key cards the enemy actually held. Between these agents a deadly, though completely secret, warfare existed. This had come about largely through the rising to power of a man named Sung, who had succeeded in rallying and uniting the vast populations of Asia, and had brought a little nearer the old nightmare of the West, that of being overrun by hordes out of the East.

"We should have shot Sung when he was a pup!" Ross Neville thought bitterly. It seemed a good solution, only unfortunately it could no longer be adopted. The trouble with people like Sung was that nobody ever recognized them for what they were until they were too powerful and too well protected to be shot. Also, if you shot a potential dictator when he was only a young upstart, you would have to reckon with the Peace At Any Price Party, a strong political power in the Union of Western Democracies. At the thought of this party, Ross Neville cursed silently. He did not know which he despised most, Sung and his spies, or the Peace Party and their secret agents. If Sung was a danger, the Peace Party were blind fools who lived in an unreal Solar System.

Listening to De Tatum talk to Mary Blythe of creatures that lived in space, Ross Neville found it very hard to realize that this man had once possessed one of the most capable brains on Earth. Yet royalties from his inventions had built this private space dome here, in a place where such structures cost a fortune, and had paid for the marvelous equipment in this laboratory.

Or had he made another discovery as important as the De Tatum Effect but was concealing it behind this talk of the creatures of space?

"In the economy of the Universe, nothing is lost and nothing is wasted," De Tatum was saying to the girl. "Considering this economy, it would be inconceivable to think that the area of space — and the planetary area is almost nothing in comparison to it — would not be utilized by life forms."

"In this universal scheme in which space is all - important, what do you consider the planets to be, Dr. De Tatum?" Neville asked.

The question got him a blank look from the girl and a vigorous answer from the scientist.

"I consider the planets to be a sort of space dung, actual excretia of the higher life forms," De Tatum answered.

"I see," Neville answered. He wished he had kept his mouth shut. On

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the subject of life in space, De Tatum was as touchy as a Peace Party member on the subject of war. There was no point in alienating the man.

"I would like to see these creatures," the girl gushed. "I'm sure a man of your genius must have devised ways of making them visible to people with ordinary eyes."

"A walking man trap!" Neville thought. He watched De Tatum bite at the oldest bait known to the human race. Or was De Tatum actually hungry for human companionship? The scientist had shut himself up for years here in this laboratory, living on dreams and delusions.

"I can show you a light pattern on an instrument but you will have to take my word for it that this pattern represents a living, thinking creature. Come with me into the next room."

He moved across the big lab, with Mary Blythe following. Ross Neville and Jay Ekko brought up the rear. They walked side by side as if neither wanted the other to have a chance to get behind him. A large piece of equipment was on their right. Neville passed it over with a glance but the girl's eye caught it. "What is that, Dr. De Tatum?"

"Oh, that," the scientist spoke with reluctance. "I — I had hoped to develop the De Tatum Effect and use it to make the space creatures visible. Unfortunately, the effort failed. It is of no consequence. Come, my dear." Taking the girl by the arm, he led her into the adjoining room.

Beside him, Neville caught the hiss of Jay Ekko's indrawn breath. The device the girl had pointed out was actually a model of the De Tatum gun. The original lines of the weapon had been radically changed but enough remained for the similarity to be clear.

Had De Tatum developed the Effect and the gun still further? Was this the discovery hinted at in the spacegram?

Neville and Ekko followed the scientist and the girl into the next room. There De Tatum was already setting in operation a device that resembled an oscilloscope except that the screen was much larger than that of the commerical models. He made motions with his hands as if he were directing an invisible creature somewhere above him. A pattern of shifting lights showed on the screen, then went away.

"That was Ariel!" De Tatum's voice was that of a child, with a child's vast enthusiasm for a new toy in it.

"How very wonderful!" the girl said.

Ross Neville was silent. Jay Ekko turned away. Glancing at the bulky chronometer he wore on his wrist, he made a slight adjustment on it.

Neville moved very quickly. He got his back to the wall and the flat little weapon out of his side pocket. "Hands up, all of you!" His words were harsh and loud in the still laboratory.

Their eyes came wonderingly to him. De Tatum seemed bewildered. He stared at the gun as if he did not know what it was but did not raise his hands. The violet eyes of the girl's expressed shock, then daze, then something that was close to an awakening. Ekko put his hands on his hips and did it deliberately. The pale lemon color of his face was more clearly visible now but determination was under the color.

"If you want to have a leg shot out from under you, just keep your hands on your hips," Neville said.

Some of the determination went

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out of Ekko's face. He glanced appealingly at De Tatum, saw that he could expect no help there, and raised his hands. "Now turn around," Neville said. The man obeyed.

Neville's search was swift but thorough. He went over the man twice to make certain there was no weapon. The fact that he found none surprised him. He would have bet this man was a Sung agent.

"What are you looking for?" Ekko asked.

"You stand over there against the wall," Neville said. When Ekko obeyed, he spoke to the girl. "You're next. You can start by giving me your purse."

"Are you a purse snatcher?" the girl asked, extending the bag. He ignored her question and tried to ignore the fact that there was no weapon in the bag. She did not flinch when his fingers went over her body. No weapon was hidden there. "Do you usually have to go to all this trouble just to feel a girl?" she asked.

He turned to the scientist. "I must apologize, Dr. De Tatum. I am an agent of the Union of Western Democracies —"

"I've long held the opinion that the Union's spies worked best with a gun in their hand," the girl said.

Again Neville ignored her. With Ekko and the girl posing no threat for the moment, he could afford to keep his attention on De Tatum. "Even though neither of these people is armed, I assure you that one of them is a Sung agent. I am taking this step to protect you."

"Eh?" De Tatum's confusion seemed to become greater.

"I assure you the man is a liar so far as I am concerned," Jay Ekko spoke, from his position against the wall. "I am a representative of the Peace Party of the Union."

Ekko spoke with calm confidence. At the words, Ross Neville felt a wind as cold as outer space blow up his spine. He had anticipated anything but this. A Sung spy he could handle, but a representative of the Peace Party —

"Ekko is a liar!" Mary Blythe squealed, indignation in her voice. "I am a representative of the Peace Party."

Neville took a deep breath and thanked the special fate that looked out for the interests of all honest Union men. "Thank you, my dear. I don't know how I would have gotten out of this hole except for you."

"I — I don't understand."

"With both of you claiming to represent the Peace Party, obviously one and maybe both of you are lying. I can shoot both of you and claim that the urgencies of action did not leave me time to decide which was telling the truth, if either of you are. The military will back me up." He spoke very firmly.

Ekko blinked startled eyes at him. But the man with the trace of yellow on his face did not question his statement. The girl did. "Well, of all things. You shoot us first and then find out later who we are! Or who I am, anyhow."

"I thought you said you were employed by Planet Syndicate."

"I am. But many people who work for the Peace Party hold two jobs. As an employee of Planet Syndicate, I came here to get a story from Dr. De Tatum. As a representative of the Peace Party and of the World Peace Movement, I came here to urge him not to make available his latest discoveries to **either** the Union of Western Democracies **or** the Sung people, for certainly both will misuse them!" She spat the words at

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Ross Neville as if they were bullets.

"All of this is very interesting," De Tatum said. "All the more so in view of the fact that I have made no discoveries except the space creatures."

"Somebody thinks otherwise," Neville answered. His eyes went from Ekko to the girl. "These two people are not here by accident. My purpose here is to make certain that any discoveries you may have made do not fall into the wrong hands —"

"Whose hands are the right ones?" the girl demanded.

"I am not trying to argue the point. The question is not so much how many millions will be killed, if Dr. De Tatum's discoveries should fall into the wrong hands, but whose side the dead will be on. Personally, I don't want them to be on either side, but if they have to come, then let them be on the side of the Sung. They breed faster and can afford them better."

"Let the bandit talk!" Ekko said. "There will come a time of reckoning. My party will see that this matter receives world wide publicity."

"Your weapon is a dangerous one," Neville answered. "But how can your party use it with you dead and unable to supply details?" He watched the lemon color on the man's face slowly turn white. Ekko kept his hands high.

"There is still me to be considered," the girl said. "Would you shoot me too?"

Ross Neville shook his head and wished he dared wipe the sweat from his face. "Not unless I have to."

"Presuming I have made some important discovery, how do you propose to get it from me, Mr. Neville?" De Tatum questioned.

"He will try to use force," Ekko said, from the wall.

"It would do him no good. The details of all discoveries I make are kept here." De Tatum tapped his forehead. "I would like to see anyone take them from me by force."

"I assure you no force —" Neville broke off speaking. Through a plastic window, he caught a glimpse of an object moving against the glare of the suns of space — a self - powered life - boat from a space ship. The mother ship was probably lying off in space somewhere but the life - boat was coming down. As he first glimpsed it, Neville thought it was heading toward the main dome of Pluto Base. A split second later, he realized it was heading straight for De Tatum's dome. Deep inside of him a hunch as to the meaning of this life - boat came up.

Ekko's hands came down, in a sweeping motion. Neville caught a glimpse of an object flashing from the man's right hand — a knife. As he tried to turn and shoot, the knife struck. His motion had thrown off Ekko's aim. The knife missed his throat. It caught him in the wrist of his gun hand. The point penetrated between the two wrist bones, sinking all the way through the flesh and coming out the other side. The gun dropped from a suddenly nerveless hand.

Neville tried to catch the falling weapon with his left hand, but Jay Ekko, hands outstretched, was upon him in a diving lunge. He dropped flat, letting his body go limp. Ekko went over him, falling heavily. Neville looked desperately for his gun. It had vanished. He only had a second. Ekko scrambled to his feet and kicked him in the throat. Pain such as Neville had never known, lanced through him, a jolt of it that seemed to hit every nerve ending in his body with a flash of lightning.

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He tried to catch the foot in one hand and upset the man, but he had no strength. Ekko kicked him again and again. He went unconscious with the sound of Mary Blythe's screams ringing in his ears.

Consciousness came back to the sound of the girl crying. Pain was still in Neville, red waves of it. He opened his eyes. The girl was sitting on the floor. A bruise showed on one cheek, a broad red blotch that formed the rough outline of a man's fist. Ekko, red gashes on his face that were the marks of her finger nails, was standing over her. He had Neville's gun in his hand.

"Try to shoot me, would you?" he was saying.

"I should have blown your head off!" Mary Blythe answered, between sobs. "I would have done it too, if I had known how to release the safety on his darned gun!"

As he heard the words, Ross Neville decided he liked this girl.

Ekko turned to De Tatum. He pulled a smile over the anger on his face that was like pulling down a window shade to hide the soiled and dirty contents of some laundry room. "Please do not let this disturb you in the least, Dr. De Tatum. You will be adequately protected, I assure you."

The scientist was standing with his back to a lab work bench. His hands, resting on the edge of the bench, showed white at the knuckles. Bewilderment was on his face and the expression in his eyes was that of a child that has been slapped when it has done no wrong.

"What is wrong, Dr. De Tatum?" Real concern sounded in the voice of the Sung agent. "Surely you don't mind my protecting you from these fools?" A wave of his hand indicated Mary Blythe and Ross Neville.

De Tatum did not seem to hear him. "You have frightened Ariel. He has gone." Pain was in his voice and the hurt bewilderment of a child was on his face.

Ekko looked bewildered too, then the smile that was like a shutter hiding the dirty linen beneath came back. "As soon as my people arrive, I will have them catch him for you."

"That is your life - boat I saw coming?" Neville asked, from the floor.

"Naturally. I have had it lying a few miles off Pluto. I sent for it when I judged the time was right. A midget micro - wave transmitter is here." He tapped the bulky chronometer on his wrist.

"Why are you bringing your thugs here?" Mary Blythe asked.

The smile became a beam. "We are going to take Dr. De Tatum back to Earth with us. There he will have the world's best laboratories at his disposal, to develop his newest discovery, and he will also be adequately protected."

"What about us?" the girl said. She nodded toward Ross Neville.

"Ah!" Jay Ekko answered.

"You want me to leave Pluto and my space-friends?" De Tatum spoke. "Never."

"I am sure we can arrange things so you can take some of your — ah — space friends with you," Ekko said, suavely.

"They wouldn't go with me. They almost never come in close to a planetary mass as great as that of Earth. The gravity fields harm them in some way. No! I am not going!" He spoke with conviction.

"I am afraid you do not have much choice in the matter, Dr. De Tatum."

"Eh? Are you threatening me?"

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"Of course not. You will have the best of everything, servants, the finest of foods and of wines. Entertainment, if you wish it. We will protect you and take very good care of you —"

"And in return you will give Sung your latest discoveries," Neville said. He wondered why Ekko did not shoot him but decided that the Sung man did not want De Tatum to witness the killing.

"I will give nothing to Sung!" De Tatum said.

"Oh, yes, you will," Neville persisted. "Did you ever hear of brain washing?"

"Propaganda!" Ekko shouted. His voice grew shrill. "If you open your mouth again, I will put a bullet in it. Dr. De Tatum, I beg you not to believe this — this —"

A clang sounded in the main air lock of the big laboratory. The smile broadened on Ekko's face. "Ah! My people. Walk ahead of me, all three of you, into the big lab, and if you make a move while I am opening the lock, it will be bad for you."

In the big central room, Ekko forced them to stand against the wall while he went to open the main lock. Neville did not see De Tatum move and did not know he had moved until a clang came from the opposite side of the room. As he turned his head to see what was happening, he realized the sound had come from the small air lock there. Horror came up in him at the sight.

"De Tatum!" Neville hardly recognized his own voice rising in a shout. "You fool! You utter hopeless fool!" He ran to the small air lock, too late. The plastic window in the wall beside it revealed the scientist fleeing across the barren waste of Pluto.

"Come back!" Even though he knew De Tatum could not hear him, Neville screamed the words.

How far could a man run in the frigid cold of a land that approached absolute zero? How long could a human being live without an atmosphere?

Ekko shoved him to one side and cursed as he saw De Tatum fleeing. The Sung man's knife was still in Neville's right arm. He had not dared remove it because this would start the blood flowing. He hit Ekko with his left fist, a blow that had all of the Union man's weight behind it and which went home on the jaw just under the ear. Ekko reeled and went down. Neville bent over and jerked the gun from his hand. He straightened up just in time to find Mary Blythe coming toward him. A three - foot long piece of steel tube clasped in two very capable hands, she was moving toward Ekko.

"Get out of my way!" she said to Neville.

"For a peace party member, you look very warlike," he said.

"There can be such a thing as making peace with the wrong people." Her face was scarlet and she looked quite capable of hitting Ekko with the steel pipe. Again, Ross Neville decided he liked this girl.

"Never mind about Ekko. He's out. De Tatum is the one who needs help. Also, we may need it ourselves!" He gestured toward the main air lock, which Ekko had been starting to open. Through the plastic window of the lock, two men could be seen. Beyond them, connected to the lock via a plastic tube, loomed the bulk of the life-boat.

As Neville moved toward the lock, the two men in it retreated into the life - boat. They had seen what had happened inside and they knew

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that the man they wanted, De Tatum, was no longer in the dome. The plastic tube was withdrawn into the life - boat and the small craft began to rise.

"They're going to try to pick up Dr. De Tatum," the girl exclaimed. "If we get into our space suits real fast, maybe we can bring him back here before they can find him."

Neville shook his head. "They don't need to go looking for De Tatum and we don't have to be in a hurry about finding him. Hand me that roll of plastic tape that's on the work bench."

Wonderingly, the girl handed it to him. He jerked the knife blade from his arm, swiftly wrapped tape around the wrist to stop the blood flow. "We'll get into our suits all right — and go pick up the body."

"W — what?"

Neville moved to the unconscious Ekko. Quickly he taped the man's hands behind his back, then taped his ankles together. He gestured toward the plastic window.

"Out there, you don't stay alive," he said. "Space hates human life."

Her face went gray, then white, and her mouth formed a soundless "O." They helped each other into the space suits they had worn in walking here from the main dome of Pluto Base.

"But why did he run away?" she whispered over the radio, after their helmets were on. "He knew it was death. Why —"

"Probably the most charitable thing we can say is that in a momentary lapse of intelligence, he thought he could run to the main dome for help," Neville said. "We can say this, if we wish. But probably we would be closer to the truth if we said that he deliberately suicided to keep from going back to Earth to serve Sung."

Far above them, the life - boat was circling in the airless sky. It was making no effort to descend. "Probably the man in charge is radioing back to the mother ship for instructions," Neville said. "Sung underlings have no authority to act as the situation requires. We can find De Tatum before they decide what to do."

They found the scientist within a hundred yards. He was lying face down in a little depression, his head cuddled on one arm. He looked like a small boy who has been playing very hard and has grown tired and has laid down for a little rest. In contrast, the white hair was a halo which seemed to glow with a dim light. As Neville went down to pick him up, he had the vague impression that De Tatum's whole body was covered with this dim light.

In his arms, the scientist's body was as limp as a rag doll. "He isn't frozen yet," Neville whispered. "Maybe if we can get him into the dome, we can revive him." With oxygen from the tank at his back hissing comfortingly in his helmet, he raced across the surface of this barren world.

There was such a thing as quick freezing, he knew. Sometimes, in quick freezing, seeming miracles happened. So far as he knew, a human body had never been quick - frozen, then revived, but maybe here on Pluto a combination of utter cold and a human being who had deliberately thrust himself into this frigidity might result in a miracle. Desperately, Neville hoped that this might happen.

Inside the dome, he laid the frail body on the floor, then began to tear off his helmet and the heavy gloves. Before he had finished, De

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Tatum took a sudden deep breath, sighed, and opened his eyes.

"I shouldn't have run," De Tatum muttered. "Running used up the oxygen in my lungs too quickly —"

Mary Blythe looked from De Tatum to Ross Neville. He saw the wonder in her eyes. She started to speak but he held up his hand for silence.

"How do you feel, Dr. De Tatum?"

"Fine." The scientist rose to a sitting position. "I was so careless as to try to run to the main dome and I used up all of my oxygen. The result was anoxia." He saw Jay Ekko, unconscious on the floor. "I see you took care of him. Good." He started to get to his feet.

"Please lie down a little longer, Dr. De Tatum," Neville said.

The scientist stared at him. "You're concerned about me! You're actually worried!"

"Well —"

De Tatum burst into hearty laughter. "You need not be concerned about me. If I had not been so careless as to run, I was in no danger out there." He gestured toward what lay beyond the dome.

"No — danger?" Neville said. His words were halting and slow as he groped for understanding. "But Dr. De Tatum, that — is — space." His voice tones carried the fear that all humans know, of the vastness where there is no air and no warmth, of the void where only light and radiation goes safely.

"Do you not understand? My friends protected me. They formed a shield around me which kept out the cold and kept in the warmth."

"Your friends?"

"Yes. The space creatures. I have often walked in that space out there, on that barren surface, for as long as half an hour, wearing nothing except ordinary clothing." He rose to his feet and stood erect, frail but apparently in good condition.

"I see you still do not believe me?" De Tatum sounded incredulous. "How much proof do you want?"

"I — proof —"

"Anyone who tries to harm me will find that I am well protected here." De Tatum moved to the window, searched the vastness above, then gestured to them. "Here! Come and look and see if I am not well protected." He pointed outward.

In the void, the life - boat was still visible. It seemed to be surrounded by a halo or a net of light. As Neville watched, the life - boat began to move erratically as if it were being jerked from its course and being pulled in one direction, then in another.

"That net of light, that halo you see, is the greater creatures of space. They came at Ariel's call, and protected me. Then they turned their attention to the life - boat."

"Ah," Neville said. "Is this —"

De Tatum nodded. "This is my great discovery. I have made no other since I have been here. I was telling you the truth all the time, even when you thought that the attempted further development of the De Tatum Effect was another weapon, I was telling the truth."

The scientist smiled. "I will be very pleased to give full details of this discovery to your government, that space is inhabited." His voice was very gentle but the tones of truth sounded in every word he said.

Ross Neville's gaze came down to the wondering eyes of the girl, then went to the face of the watching scientist, then went back to the lifeboat that was pursuing such an erratic course out there.

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As he watched, the life-boat came apart at the seams. From its interior, it spewed a cluster of men and of machines out into the void. Knowing what was happening there, he caught his breath. For an instant, De Tatum was also sad.

After the machines and men had been spewed forth, the light net that seemed to surround the life - boat disappeared. Only a tiny fragment remained. It moved directly toward the watching humans.

"Ariel, coming back to me," De Tatum said. The sadness was going away from his voice and a happiness was replacing it. He sounded like a child recovering a beloved toy that has been thought lost, or a scientist announcing a great discovery to a doubting world, or a lonely human being who had found in space the friends he had never knew on Earth.

THE END

SUPERSTITIONS OF THE SEA

By MILDRED MURDOCH

IT IS not strange that in ages past there were a great number and variety of superstitions rampant among men who roamed the seas. The wonder is that anyone would venture out of sight of land at all. In the Middle Ages the seas and oceans of the world were largely uncharted, unsounded, and unexplored. The imaginations of men had a vast scope for conjecture, fed by the terrors men have always felt of the unknown, by their occasional glimpses of slimy monsters of the deep, and by their knowledge of the brutality and ferocity of their fellow-men. It is a tribute to the inherent courage and persistence of mankind that in the period when the sea was wrapt in a dense mist of fable and false belief and deadly fears, the most daring and bold of all voyages were undertaken. Exploration of the unknown has always been carried on by men, regardless of perils encountered or fears for the future.

Some of the superstitions engendered by the fears of long ago remain to this day; many of them have faded away as ignorance and surmise have given away to knowledge.

Men used to fear to sail southward, because after passing a certain point on the coast of Africa, it was said that sailors would turn black; further south, the rays of the sun became liquid flame. Northward were thought to be many fearsome things. The Maelstrom no doubt gave rise to many wild stories, as did the geysers and volcanoes of Iceland, and the variation of the compass in the northern regions. The West also had its superstitions, though mostly of a pleasanter kind, probably due to the enchantment and splendor of the sunset.

Sirens lured lonely sailors to destruction, and mermaids were the basis of other strange tales of the sea. The legend of the Flying Dutchman persisted for generations, with no definite proof ever having been given of his existence. There were many variations of the story, but one thing was sure—an encounter with the Flying Dutchman was always unlucky, and any ship which suffered that disaster was certain to be dogged by famine, pestilence and storms for ever after.

A phenomenon of nature, which exists to this day, gave rise to many superstitions in the past. That is St. Elmo's Fire, a rather common and very beautiful manifestation of a highly electrical state of the atmosphere.

Myriads of other superstitions used to govern the whole life of a sailor. He would not go to sea on a Friday, or be so bold as to whistle on board ship. Some seamen used to buy wind from witches and carry it on board with them, tied up in bags, for use when the need arose. It was a crime to destroy or use any paper containing passages from Scripture; yet a clergyman on board carried ill-luck. A death at sea was supposed to bring on a storm, and sharks to follow a ship on which there was illness. It is amazing, indeed, to think that men dared to venture into a realm so beset with perils and terror and uncertainty. And yet men have ever done this, and will continue to do so as long as there remains in our world unknown frontiers of geography or science.

THE END

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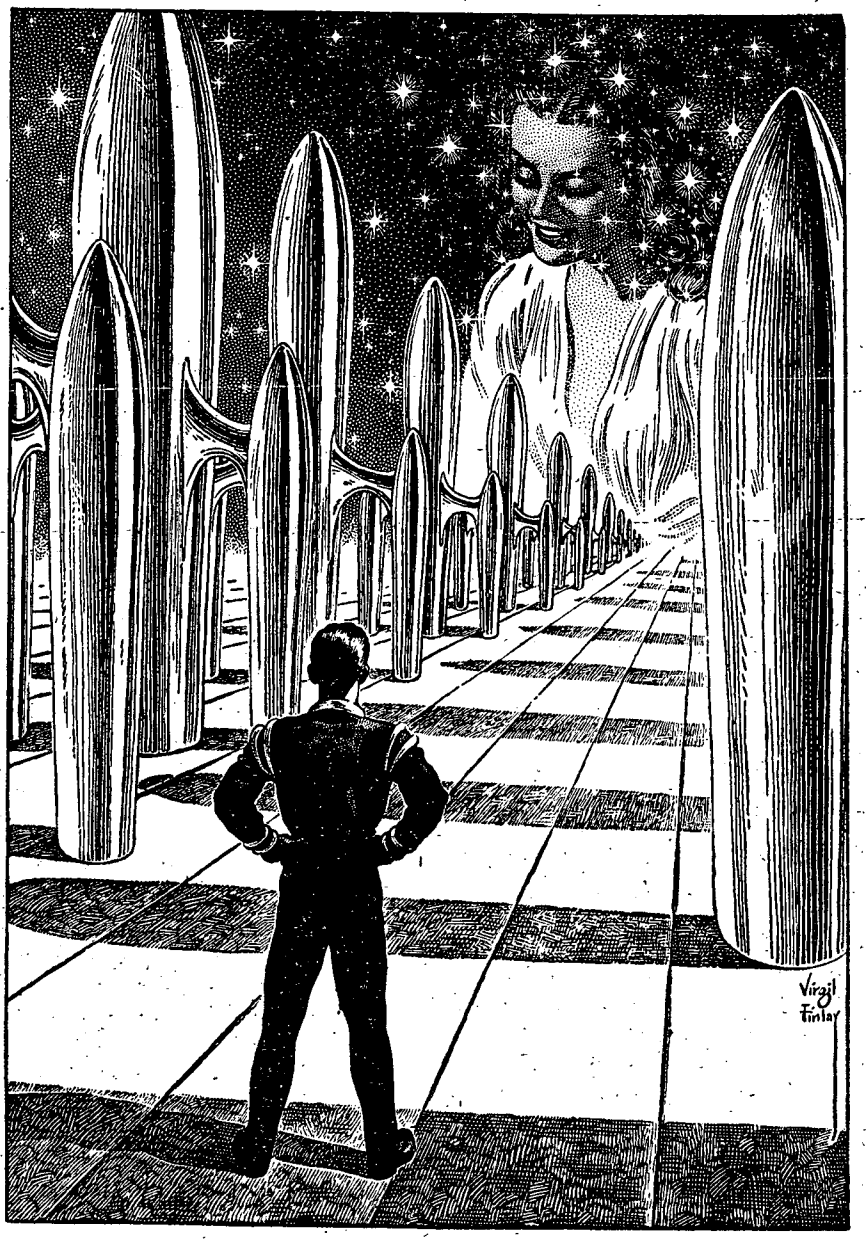
QUEST OF BRAIL

By Richard S. Shaver

Before him in his dreams he saw a beautiful face—a goddess who called to him insistently



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"SO BEAUTIFUL — so magnificent a city! And I must fight a war to lose it! Deliberately lose a war!"

Brail, ruler of the planet Helgo and Emperor of a score of planets strung like matched pearls across the night sky, was, as usual, feeling impotent. His square, darkly ruddy face was grim. He stared out over the lovely city visible from the balustrade of his palace, Bersalt.

Bersalt, the huge and ancient palace of the lords of Helgo, had been built in the misty past by men of mighty wisdom and a now lost science. Added to and altered interiorly from time to time, the palace covered a half - dozen square miles, being in truth a city. Fabricated from polished rock, it leaped up strangely, an alien thing of blood - red battlements and tall, mysterious towers. Helgonians had long hated Bersalt for all it symbolized. For centuries revolt after revolt had flattened in despairing fury against its walls with no result but more death for the people. Only the present ruler's popularity was holding back the people now from seizing upon the chance offered to revolt while the Horde's invasion occupied the war fleets.

Brail left the balcony and paced impatiently into the great Hall of the Faces. His hand rumpled the heavy red hair that tumbled over his brow. The Horde, the hated Horde was on its all - conquering way to take over the Helgonian Empire as it had taken over so many great nations of space. He, Brail, must send his loyal men to death — to certain, unavoidable death. They must do battle and they must lose. By the black bowels of Mother Night, if he, Brail, were but ruler in truth, it would be different. His broad, red - bristled fist clenched fiercely, his teeth flashed. This was his chance — he would not fail. The Horde would win, and the play - acting would end.

Brail's mind reviewed the situation. . .

Helgo had ever been a poor place for the common man to live. For ages the use of pleasure vibrants had developed in secret and the rich, who alone held them, were all addicts. Their children, strangely perverted and deformed in both shape and character, had grown up generation after generation to form at last a fixed rigid class, the owners of pleasure rays. Attached to this class were most of the young and pretty girls of the planet. These were seized as soon as grown to the age of attraction and trained for the slave marts, which were secret places to the people. From the slave marts they found their way to their cruel and powerful lord's pleasure palaces to contribute their short life to unending orgies.

The condition of these slaves might have been alleviated had there been any opportunity for these or for enslaved workers to attain positions of importance under the ruling class, but those who were expert in the use of the pleasure rays were sedulous in their care to madden and degenerate any of their creatures who showed ambition or capability so that subjection to the rays meant near idiocy for most of them.

This, however, had in time become true of the entire ruling class, so that in all Helgo there were but few men and women of power and influence who retained mental alertness. Among these was Prince Brail, now the Emperor, ruler by right of succession. He sat publicly upon the throne in Bersalt, his inscrutable expression hiding the astounding discovery he had made upon succession to the throne: that govern-

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ment was in the hands of madmen and that their secret knowledge of the mysterious rays was such that he must play complaisant puppet or die.

With their penetrative vision rays which could see and slay him anywhere in Bersalt, he must do their bidding or perish. Brail had been obliged to accept the situation until some way opened to him for a change. His people believed him a wise ruler although in fact he had no more to say about rule than the least man in the empire. Yet the army liked him and orders from his lips were executed without delay or murmur, so that on the surface all was well with the government in Helgo. Yet the mad and cruel clique tortured and slew whom they pleased and there was no peace or safety for any man who did not possess the secret weapons. The common man's daughters were stolen from under his helpless, hating eyes; his sons recruited into the army or into labor crews at tender ages; his crops brought little or no profit to him when sold, and he and his wife were tormented from afar by unseen powerful rays in the hands of madmen and madder children. None of this was laid at the door of Brail, it was considered the workings of strange and malevolent beings dwelling in inaccessible underground caverns. For such was the known case on other planets.

Now, adding to the exigencies of daily unhappy living, news came from space of the Horde, sweeping on undefeated from sun to sun, and the poor of Helgo prayed on bended knee to their ancient, nigh - forgotten Gods, begging that the Horde might conquer, since the undefeated enemy might also defeat the evil that lay in secret hiding, making their lives unbearable. That this was traitorous to their prince could not be helped; the drowning do not split hairs about what they clutch.

BRAIL'S fiery hair caught the blue light from the third sun as he strode back and forth in the Hall Of The Faces. His thoughts were confused and bitter, for defeat might mean the amelioration of present conditions for his people, but it might also mean that loss of all the work he had secretly done in spite of the hidden watchers. Victory for Brail's forces could mean both the continuation of the present hideous situation in which he found himself and the chance to develop his plans further.

If his ancestors could see him, Brail, the son of Brail, a puppet under an idiot! They had conquered the galaxy, planet by planet, and he who should be the greatest of them all must slyly and purposely lose that tremendous empire, world by world.

That the Horde had some mighty secret power was undeniable and without a knowledge of its nature, how could they be beaten away from Helgo? Such were his excuses to his stupid masters. Yet fight he must, and that soon, or they would kill him before his plans matured.

His troubled thoughts ripened into action. He strode out upon the gallery surrounding the great bowl on which lay the space communicator. His muscular fingers turned on the activator, the pearly cloud glowed luminously and then turned dark as infinite space. Obedient to his own recent orders there deployed within that blackness the lights of many spaceships, lights from his fleet now many **parsecs** distant. The vision - screen before him brought clearly the presence of Urdil, fleet commander. The man's voice came in over the audiphone.

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"We have not sighted them as yet, my prince."

"When you do, bend every effort to isolating and capturing at least one ship intact. Then retreat and hold the position about Bersalt. We cannot afford another defeat like the last one and we cannot meet the Horde in successful battle until we know more about their secret methods."

"I hear and obey, Prince Brail."

Commander Urdil's likeness faded from the vision - screen.

Brail returned thoughtfully to his pacing in the great hall. From the walls the death masks of his ancestors scowled upon him as if resentful of his impotence. He could only wait with impatience for the capture of a Horde space - ship and perhaps from the personnel he might learn something of the Horde's mysterious invincibility. It was well worth a try. Fight he must, even with the sure prospect of defeat. He was sick unto death of enforced pretense, everlasting play - acting, duping of men whom he liked and admired. The farce would end with defeat and within possibility he might himself escape into some kind of anonymous freedom. This could not be if he were forced to inurement in the pit of Bersalt, his princely person a screen to hide those hated monsters who in reality tyrannized over Helgo.

He vowed with grinding teeth that this should never come to pass. Better rot in the Horde's prison than be instrumental for a continued hated misgovernment by the hidden rulers over his wretched people, who might indeed fare better under the Horde about whose treatment of inferior classes nothing definite could be learned as yet. His face, dark with conflicting thoughts, grim with concentrated will, lifted to the death masks that hung interminably along the wall opposite the wide windows.

"Better death than further serfdom," said Brail's low, snarling voice. "I'll crawl to these bloated masters of mine no more."

HE PUSHED one hand roughly through the thick red hair so characteristic of his princely line, the other going involuntarily to his girdle where he had once thought ingenuously to wear the dis - ray needle hand gun, but where now only a short jeweled dagger was suspended. His tightly compressed lips drew back against his white teeth as there flashed over him the hot but futile fury of his impotence under the real rulers of his realm. The gray eyes darkened as he wheeled to face the portal at the farther end of the hall, that door which he loathed as a symbol of his degradation, since through it he must yet go many times at the behest of those monstrous beings that existed behind it. His hand slipped down to his side, empty of any weapon. Not while the secret rulers reigned would he be permitted to handle what might well be turned against them.

Once again he strode with easy grace to the gallery overlooking the menticloud basin. At the subsidiary visi-screen he turned a knob slowly until he could locate the advancing air fleet of that invincible armada of the Horde. He leaned his tall figure toward the screen and concentrated upon those approaching space - ships. He enlarged the image of the foremost until the likeness of the pilot stood out with bold distinctness.

Brail studied the strong square face thoughtfully. The pilot's straight upper lip wore a small black moustache to which its owner occasionally touched one index finger

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lightly as if to reassure himself of the presence of a hirsute adornment that in turn did much for the frank countenance. The man's keen black eyes were fixed ahead toward the goal of Helgo and Bersalt. The nostrils of the slightly flattened nose, that looked as though it had sometime stopped a fist or two, twitched noticeably betraying the pilot's intense inner excitement.

Brail said aloud: "I like this chap. If the rest are like him, my people will be better off." Brail focused the lead ray of the great thought cloud on the face in the vision - screen. His thought pictures formed clear in the super augmentation of the great mechanism.

THE pilot's eyes were fixed ahead. Black and hot in the depths of his mind lay an image; a dark goddess smiled and drew him on. In the birthplace of all life, at the head waters of the river called Styx, under the roots of Yggdrasil the tree of being, deep beyond the last veil of consciousness, he sensed the warm, dark pulsation that carried within itself the answer to all mysteries.

About him were unwanted sterile things, old and forgotten, waiting for the wash of Time to sweep them up and off upon its heavy, dusty bosom. But Life is other than Time. Time is slow destruction while Life births forever as a plant puts forth leaves. To cease growing, he thought, is to begin dying and death was horrible to him as to all men.

"With my aid you may defeat dark Death. With my help you can grow and even live forever. I am calling you. Come to me for wisdom and guidance. Seek me out. I shall await you." This was the message the young pilot seemed to sense from that distant dark goddess whom he felt filled space ahead, blotting out the stars with unceasing, irresistible growth.

Lori drew a long breath of yearning for fulfillment of dreams that he knew might never come true. He was after all but a small cog in the mighty mechanism of the Horde; only a serial number among his shipmates. His mother had named him Lori, and the sound of that childhood name on his tongue, muttered half aloud, brought with it nostalgia for the days when he was not a robot pilot on a space - ship of the Horde, but an individual child, a personage small but important in his immediate family. He tried to check this current of thought, knowing well it would be read by the co - ordinator of his mind - team, to his detriment, and following his effort there crackled through his brain the too audible voice:

"Asleep on duty, B23X? And you a chief pilot? What in the name of the gods were you dreaming?"

Lori snapped to alertness, black eyes sweeping the instrument panel, hands passing rapidly over the controls. The fleet formation on the visi - screen was intact and he relaxed thankfully.

"An old dream of mine, of the dark goddess of life. I shall stay awake now," he spoke mentally to the co - ordinator.

"We should sight the enemy within the hour. On your toes!"

The mental voice of the co-ordinator was the voice of his own will, so long had they trained together, thought Lori. He told himself with savage resentment, it was too much so. By a strong effort of his trained will he concentrated on the work to which he had been assigned, clearing his mind withal regretfully of those illusive but al-

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luring dreams of the beneficent offerings of a dark and powerful goddess.

* * *

THE soft susurrus of silken garments caught Brail back into consciousness of his present surroundings; he turned quickly. A girl, young and lovely, subtly feminine in every movement of her lithe body as she drifted toward him up the hall, met his gray eyes with a smile that lighted up her oval, charming face.

"My dear lord, are you to have no rest until Bersalt is —" her voice trailed off into significant silence.

Brail beckoned her to his side.

"Look here, Mirrla. What would you think of this Hordeman pilot? Is he not an attractive fellow?"

Mirrla gazed long at the vision-screen, nodding slowly.

"He can be trusted, my lord. He is truly good. But he is troubled. . ."

The prince turned off the vision-screen.

"Can the other Hordemen be like him? Or is he possibly an exception to his fellows?" he cogitated aloud.

"Have you asked Commander Urdil to capture one ship intact, as you planned?" asked the girl. "I do hope it will be this one. Then you may be able to learn something of the Horde's secret weapons, for I do not believe that pilot is a contented man. There is something resentful and bitter in his expression."

"My wise Mirrla," murmured Brail, passing one hand caressingly down the waving length of her fair tresses.

Under the lightly tender contact the girl's eyes closed and a blissful expression flitted across her charming face.

Brail breathed a gusty sigh.

"I must make a report to our glorious rulers," he commented drily as he paced down the hall toward the loathed doorway, his arm about the girl's slender waist. "Our glorious belly - worms," he added, in her ear.

"Can you not rest with us a while then?" She pleaded softly as they paused before the portal.

He shook his head, whispered, "If I loaf, the enemy Horde might lose." Then, aloud. "No, my girl. I must watch over the fleet maneuvers so that the moment our captured prize is brought to Bersalt we may be ready for a questioning of her crew."

Mirrla touched his temples lightly with both delicate hands.

"May the Dark Goddess protect you, my dear."

* * *

LORI concentrated savagely on the space-ship's controls but his mind wandered afar, for the Helgonian fleet had not yet been sighted and there was little to do but keep the ship on her course. Recruited at sixteen by the Horde's agents, as were most of the youth of the planet Keshen, B23X had seen but little of life save the interior of the battleships of space, for the Horde was eternally at war, adding to its continually increasing empire as it absorbed one after the other of small neighboring planets. The discipline in the training corps was Spartan, the concentration in mind synchronization broadening as the thoughts handled by students were infinitely more numerous and complex than those of the single individual. The strength of the coordination command signals was too strong, subtly so, in that the individual will was in time affected and no Hordeman felt initiative will of his own, when the synchronizing helmets were donned and the fleet in action. Land liberties were few

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and oftenest under conditions where entertainment lacked, so that the men's few free moments were taken up with woman yearning and futile dreams of freedom to be theirs when the seemingly endless struggles would at long last be finished.

The young pilot had his own dreams, bizarre and unusual to such an extent that he never shared them with his comrades, more outspoken than he in their nightly dreaming. For some years Lori had been meeting in his dreams the same tall, green-skinned witch-queen, officiating over strange love ceremonies where he served as acolyte. He had come to believe that no flesh-and-blood woman could possibly match the appeal of this alluring creature who lived on magically in his mind when he wakened each morning from his dreams of her. He counted her love a greater one than he could find elsewhere, and he called her Norla. The only other vision that drifted through his sleeping mind was that recurrent one of a Dark Goddess of Life.

She filled space mystically in a certain quarter afar and called to him as a mother calls to her strayed child. That these visions were anything but vivid dreams Lori did not have sufficient knowledge to realize. With deep yearning his innermost self reached out to that Dark Goddess whose call sounded so alluringly, with such strong promise, in the ears of his mind. The Hordeman soldier's life subordinating as it did everything that might make for individuality, revolted the young pilot and only in that deep beckoning from the far spaces could he sense any hope for future liberty of thought or will.

Lori watched the obstacle indicator ray dial and forward vision-screen into which the space-ship bored with incredible speed. If the Horde were beaten back, his own capture might not be such a dread calamity. Could it not be possible that life under Prince Brail might hold more agreeable vistas of noble adventure in living than the dull life of a Hordeman?

Dim but unfailing, that soft whisper touched him through space. The Dark Goddess flung temptingly infinite promise of goodly and gracious living before the eyes of his mind. Lori's even teeth gritted with his determination to learn the visionary or real character of that Goddess, as well as her qualifications as leader and guide. These visions of her, experienced by many, were ignored by other spacemen as meaningless phenomena of space, like mirages.

Sitting at the space ship controls on one horn of the Horde's attacking crescent, Lori became suddenly aware that the entire ship was shaking like a Venusian dancer's G-string. What in Hades—? He had never experienced this sort of thing in all his years on the battleships. The vibrations grew faster and finer until he felt that every fibre of his body was being shaken apart from its fellows. His hands slipped down from the controls. His brain dulled and before his eyes black night dropped smotheringly upon him.

He slipped unconscious from his seat.

* * *

BRAIL turned the dial of the hated door. Behind it lay the murky heart of his empire, that group of the powerful rich whose evil habits had at last forced them into building this hidden place for those repeated debauches which consumed the lives of the best and loveliest in the empire. Brail was but their man, their thing, their figure-head

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whose upright life was to dupe the people into stupid loyalty. Brail, who despised and loathed them, continued ever to hold his place, that he might serve at times as a buffer between their cruelty and his victimized people.

Brail's husky voice murmured the secret words and the door opened slowly at his touch on the dial. He passed through a long corridor after the door closed behind him and emerged into an immense vaulted room, the ceiling of which depicted the blue canopy of heaven, lighting the apartment with a brilliantly spreading glow from a miniature sun. Over a hundred slave girls, their nude bodies bathed in the powerful spreading stim-rays, were scattered in groups or singly about the downy couches and cushioned reclining chairs upon which lolled luxuriously those members of the wealthy class who secretly ruled Helgo through Brail's compulsory complaisance.

Closer within the stim-ray circle knelt a dozen beautiful women and young girls who had become hopelessly addicted to its induced pleasures. These addicts were in the condition in which the Fat Ones desired them to be, praying endlessly for a scant trifle to ease their hunger, willing to render up their lives for one sweep of its intensified thrills. Within the heavy wire enclosure about the stim the endless indulgence continued, carefully regulated for the Fat Ones but cruelly augmented for the slave women, whose doom was too frequenty death from the terrific nervous over-stimulation.

Brail stood there for a long moment, staring with narrowed gray eyes at the orgiastic scene. As he gazed upon that mad tangle of flesh was fastidious shrinking, he thought how different the picture could be under the direction of those Wise Ones who had originally built the stim. He could see the velvet bodies moving slowly and beautifully, dark, glistening eyes seeming to mesmerize the onlooker and gracefully beckoning hands stretching out with allure. Disgust at the mad mess before him gave Brail a sensation of nausea. This endless indulgence unto death—these burning, swooning bacchantes—these fat, formless masters of his . . . he brushed his hand involuntarily across his gray eyes as if to remove reality so that the brighter dreams could shine through uninhibited.

"WOMEN!" thought Brail. "Women! How little in truth do these Fat Ones know them, to make of them mere vessels of ignorant indulgence to make of them mindless slaves to an idiot's false desire." Brail knew the growth potential in these stim rays, and he thought with keen yearning of the dreams that haunted him of voluptuous-lipped queen-bee women of vast superiority of beauty and being which the stim rays, intelligently handled, would have made of those wretched addicts. In his dreams those women hung in the last veil of his waking consciousness, their lips that curled into ready laughter; their long rich bodies moving with grace, their voices caressing the ear with song-like talk of infinitely clever sounds and meanings of which he could never tire. Oh, if he could but take over the stim-ray machines—He jerked himself into reality with a drawing-back of his powerful shoulders under the gold-encrusted jacket. The rays were in the hands of the Fat Ones, the rich and cruel and degenerate ignorant who had in ages past murdered the inventors to protect the great secret of their use. With those rays the Fat Ones could

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follow Brail to great distances and slay him were he to revolt against their idiotic rule.

The prince stepped forward into the room with reluctance for his clean soul revolted ever at the obligation to present himself before the Fat Ones as their vassal. He addressed himself to a fat prince whose couch stood on a slightly raised dais.

"Great Prince of Helgo, our fleet is by this time engaging the oncoming Horde's van. Should the Horde prove once more invincible, you must be prepared for instant flight. Thus far none have been able to withstand them and we, too, may fall before their secret weapons."

The fat prince moved his thick body sluggishly, his deep, oily voice, hardly human in intonation but merely the instrument of an insatiable appetite, issued as if reluctantly from his swollen lips.

"I have long been prepared. Look you to the battle." The voice sharpened to a cruelly ominous note. "Be sure we meet with success, little princeling."

Brail's shoulders jerked again. His square dark face flushed redly at the threat which he dared not resent openly.

"Life is sweet, Prince Brail," drawled the Fat One, showing his teeth in an ugly smile.

His hand gestured wearily to a pillar, from a metal projection of which a woman was suspended by her long glossy braids of hair. The poor creature's pain-wracked body jerked slowly under the influence of a pain-vibrant. That she was near death if the pain-vibrant continued its work Brail saw, since she must have hung for days under the impact of the pain impulse rays which knotted and shook her body as if she had been a fish impaled on a barbed hook.

"DEATH, my Brail, is never welcome or agreeable," murmured the Fat One thickly, watching with pride the victim of his dismal cruelty and obviously convinced that the puppet prince would take the lesson to heart.

Brail queried softly, "What was her offense, Prince Onil?"

He strove to conceal his repugnance at sight of that weary, writhing body, so beautiful, so near to death's relief.

The Fat One wailed with petulance. "She bit me."

"Love often bites," Brail murmured. "Since you are tired of her, give her to me, my Onil. Gratitude is a good stimulant to love and she is by far too lovely for a death doom. An artist like you," he insinuated persuasively, "cannot really desire to destroy such beautiful flesh, when there are so many women less desirable whose long-drawn-out agonies could be quite as intriguing. Give her to [illegible]."

"Take her! Take her away. She bores me. She is too long in dying. She is too modest to suffer well. But no dallying now with love," the thick voice warned. "Back to the vision-screen, Prince. Commander Urdil may stand in need of your counsel."

Prince Onil dismissed Brail with the gesture of one raised fat finger and bent his gaze upon a lovely woman kneeling near him under the stim ray, her face portraying almost agonized pleasure as she relaxed to the vibrations.

Prince Brail strode to the pillar and switched off the pain ray. He pulled the dagger from his girdle and slashed at the rope knotted to the swooning woman's long braids. He snatched up a cloak, and flung it about the quivering, relaxed body, which he lifted in his powerful arms. He made haste to leave that den of

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automatic, destroying lust, scowling as he strode down the Hall Of the Faces, thinking as he went with his burden of wrecked beauty how strange and unjust was that social system which gave to beastly monsters a plentitude of feminine beauty, the only use for which was to pander to monsters without true desire. They had no true desire for beauty or women, but only the hideous lust of an automaton.

AT THE entrance of his private apartments Brail motioned the guard to open the door. He carried the limp body inside. At his entrance to the open court centered by a sparkling pool of water in which several slave girls disported themselves gaily, Mirrla sprang from her seat before a tapestry frame upon which her clever fingers were depicting the likeness of her loved lord upon a golden throne whence he dispensed justice.

"Poor thing!" she cried involuntarily.

Brail laid the drooping, swooning body tenderly upon a couch.

Mirrla bent over the other woman, pitying eyes gentle and mournful. Other slave girls began to gather. Those girls were the puppet prince's sole confidantes. None but what owed him some debt of gratitude for their rescue from one or another of the Fat Ones. This woman was not the first victim of the hidden rulers' tortures whom the slave girls had cared for and brought back to living loveliness and some modicum of hope in life.

"Treat her with the anaesthetic ray," Brail suggested. "She has suffered too much and too long and her best chance is a deep, induced sleep."

Two of the maidens wheeled a portable lamp to the couch where the rescued woman lay, breathing feebly with an effort. They switched on the lamp, from which a blackish opalescence streamed. That ray would block off the nerve impulses and stop all body sensation.

Brail watched as the women clustered about. Some set to work kneading and massaging the painfully knotted muscles, smoothing out the soft pain-wracked flesh, rubbing in soothing oils. One of the girls knelt at his feet, wrapping her soft arms about his thighs and lifting her adoring face to meet his grim gaze.

"Think no more of what has been, my lord. You have enough responsibility without suffering for your creatures, all of whom love you. Soon this poor thing will worship you as do we, and find her truest happiness in anticipating your every wish."

The prince's dark face softened. His left hand pushed up the heavy red hair and his right twisted softly in the girl's bright locks.

"My Reema, remember that if we fall into the hands of the Horde, you and Mirrla and the rest of you lovelies may have a chance for life if you feign joy at being liberated from my dominion. Let them think you hate everyone in the palace. That may be your best way to serve me. We know but little of the Horde and they may be kinder to serve than are the Fat Ones."

"If they put you in prison, dear lord. . . ." she faltered.

"Then you will come to stop the whips and the fire tortures and the pains rays, if you can."

"We will free you and hide you among us," she cried wildly.

Brail gave a short laugh.

"I thank you for your plans, Reema, but I doubt your opportunities to carry them out. Only the Dark Goddess can know what you may be able to do, for you are far from stu-

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pid, my girl."

He thought to himself, that if the palace were to fall, the sooner the better. Yet he must go through the motions, if only to preserve his own life from the death rays in the hands of Prince Onil. He had to be on his way, back to the thought cloud. He released Reema's bright hair, tossing it playfully about her bowed shoulders.

"Mirrla, I go. If I am needed, I shall be in the gallery by the thought cloud."

Mirrla, wide eyes meeting his in an agony of apprehension for his safety, nodded slowly from her place at the couch of the sleeping woman. She watched the beloved form of her lord as he disappeared through the guarded entrance to the apartments. Then she returned to the work in hand, giving her instructions to the slave girls as they stood about the couch.

ONCE again confronting the bowl of the thought cloud, Brail watched the pearly swirl darkening into the black of space. His thoughts wandered to the Helgonian fleet. He reproached himself remorsefully because he admitted his lack of interest in the final result of the ensuing battle. He realized that even his actions as he followed the natural course of leadership were largely automatic. He could bring no reason into the forefront of his mind for the betterment of Helgo should the Helgonian fleet beat off the space ships of the Horde successfully. He bent his will upon the thought cloud and switched on the vision-screen.

In the depths of the black cloud there began to take shape a wide crescent composed of thousands of great space battleships that were the Horde's and opposing them the thin triangle that was the Helgonian fleet. Like a huge wedge the triangle aimed at one bow of the crescent and as the two opposing formations neared, ship after ship burst into flares of incandescent brilliance and then floated, masses of wreckage, out of the fight.

Brail, observing with keen interest the apparently similar qualities of the opposing weapons, mused that the losses were about equal and as far as he could judge the Helgonian space ships were superior in speed. He dialed a close-up. The great horn of the Horde's attacking crescent was badly chewed and the point of the Helgonian wedge bit through, then broke up and formed into a circle that cut off two of the alien space ships completely from their formation. He recognized as he watched that Commander Urdil was following his instructions. Great tractor rays from the entire Helgonian fleet held the two enemy ships in the center of their circle and began to draw away in this formation from the attacking crescent.

Knowing well how a tractor ray, properly interrupted, can shake a ship until the whole crew drops insensible, the prince knew now what Commander Urdil had done to the silent captive spacers. The encounter had cost Helgo ten great warships and the enemy had lost but six, which included the two ships captured intact. The Helgonian fleet was fortunate enough, considering the odds against them. Brail watched with approval the swift retreat of the Helgonian fleet, realizing that the advantage in speed was not the only reason for the rapidly increasing distance between it and the invaders' fleet. Beyond doubt the commander of the Horde suspected a trap, in view of this too - easy de-

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feat, if defeat it could be termed; his pursuit was cautious and almost appeared reluctant. It was obvious that the enemy was in no rush to pursue hastily a fleet that sped away while yet there was some hope of successful combat. Such tactics were almost too pointed.

* * *

HOW long he remained dead to the world Lori could not tell, when he first opened his eyes. He lay on a couch in a small cell of solid stone walls. At his slight movement he felt the weight of the irons locked about his ankles. He swung his feet heavily to the stone paving and sat up on the edge of the couch and saw then that he was not alone.

Muffled in a long cloak, a girl stood near the barred door. As Lori stirred, she spoke swiftly in an alien tongue, directing her speech at a microphone in her hand. Almost immediately the iron door swung open and a Helgonian officer came into the cell, drawing a key from his girdle as he came. He motioned to the young pilot to swing his feet back onto the couch and at Lori's comprehending obedience, the officer unlocked the irons. He beckoned the young prisoner to follow and left the room with the girl, proceeding up a narrow corridor that opened into a long hall and a waiting elevator.

With its passengers the elevator rose, passed floor after floor. At last it stopped and the girl touched a button that opened the door and motioned to Lori to follow her. She tripped lightly down the hall and opened a door, stood back, and gestured for the young pilot to enter. Lori hesitated on the threshold. Such a room he had never seen in all his Spartan - trained life. The code of the Horde had been 'simplicity, obedience, sacrifice.' This was such an apartment as Lori had never even dreamed could exist. He stared, stupefied, at the pillars glittering with jeweled carvings in wondrous colors, at the rich furs that were scattered here and there on the marble pavement, at the gorgeously brocaded hangings and tapestries that hung against the walls. His eyes widened at the many sleek, bejeweled maidens stretched on downy divans like great beautiful cats. Most of all, he gazed last and longest at the central figure of that magnificence, the red - haired young man who sat on a dais above it all, one hand twisted lightly in the bright hair of the girl who crouched like a slave at his feet.

In the code of the Horde, luxury was a sin, but Lori's yearning desires betrayed his secret longing to live amid such sumptuous furnishings, surrounded by such lovely women. As he stood, almost stupidly staring, wide black eyes amazed, one of the women rose from her divan and, pouring a golden goblet full of purple wine from a chased and jeweled golden jug, approached him and proffered the beverage. She smiled encouragingly as she held out the goblet and Lori, accepting it thankfully, smiled back at her, wondering at the strange pallor of her creamy flesh and the tiny flakes of sparkling gold that glittered everywhere through her heavy black tresses. He flung back his head, lifted the goblet to her as if toasting her beauty, and drained the goblet of its stinging wine. She took the emptied goblet and motioned him to go forward to the dais.

THE prince with the red hair also lifted a beckoning finger that gestured to a nearby chair over which lay a network of fine wires

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that led to a cable lying on the floor. Lori bent a suspicious look at the wires that seemed to promise trickery, but the maiden pushed him back gently and he sank into the chair. Another slave girl approached and laced upon his head an odd-shaped metal cap, smiling as she did so. He heard a light whisper in his own familiar tongue as she bent over him.

"Be not afraid. The Red One is kindly. You have nothing to fear from these wires."

Lori stiffened, still suspicious, and sat motionless, awaiting the event. He became aware of a silvery mist that began to form between himself and the throned prince, a mist that as it grew thicker shaped strangely into pictures and words and he realized with a start that the pictures came from his own mind as did the thoughts there framed into words.

At this betraying mist the Red One looked long, reading his captive's inmost self. Then words issued absently from his lips, as if he spoke only to himself.

"What is the secret of the invincible strength of the Horde?" asked that voice, with a kind of grim determination.

Too late Lori realized the intent of the Helgonian prince. He strove in vain to blank his mind, but in spite of his wish he saw on the thought cloud the picturing of those long years of mind-team work, when he and his group of fellow entrainees had learned to think as one man, although a hundred minds together. There lay betrayed by his unwilling thoughts the methods by which the group had been taught to sink their wills until their wills became the will of the co-ordinator at their head, in such a way that any question asked of the group was immediately answered by that one of them best fitted to reply. Pictured in the mist were the years of maneuvers, when they had learned to see through the eyes of all the men in all the vision-screens of all the ships; to see all possible tactical answers to a problem in space maneuvers in all the minds and help the co-ordinator check for the best one. This secret now lay bared to the absorbed eyes of the ruler of Helgo, the mental co-ordination of the minds of all the crews in a whole fleet of warships which had taken so long to develop into the marvelous and beautiful weapon it had become at last.

Brail mused aloud: "My good pilot, the secret of yours will do Helgo small good in this present crisis, so why trouble yourself because you have unwillingly betrayed it?"

Lori could not speak for very chagrin.

BRAIL'S voice went on impersonally, but with a warm undercurrent of friendliness.

"What would you most like to do, pilot, if you had the resources to follow your desires to the utmost?"

Lori stared as his traitorous mind threw into the thought-cloud his cherished dream of a space ship of his own, himself at the controls, heading for that deep black among the stars where he had so often dreamed that the Dark Goddess of Life dwelt, where Death was a prohibited stranger. And then Lori saw his latest dream, himself in a room in that spaceship, a room luxurious as was this room in Bersalt's castle, himself enthroned on a dais, twisting his fingers sensuously in the bright hair of the fair slave girl at his feet.

The voice of Prince Brail broke in upon his dreaming.

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"How long do you think it will take your friends to conquer Helgo, pilot?"

Lori's mind involuntarily made swift, unwilling comparison of the strength of the Helgonian fleet with other vanquished fleets and the result of his mental cogitations lay clearly on the thought cloud; four or at the most five days, and Helgo would be at the mercy of the Horde.

"You are undoubtedly correct, my friend," Brail's voice admired. "But do you sense no exultation at our approaching annihilation? Do you not love your comrades? Do you wish them to fail, to die?"

Lori could not reply. His fixed attention was upon the thought cloud and the pictures he portrayed. There he read his hatred of the Spartan code of the Horde, which denied its adherents pleasure or luxury until some far day of achievement; the code which placed all their wills and energies in the control of the co - ordinators. The young pilot's black eyes smouldered with sudden rage and resentment as he saw before him the layout of his secret hatred of the never - ending training and drilling, his longing for a sweeter, more satisfying way of life, his desire for something to call his own . . . a wish denied. All these things lay in swiftly changing pictures between himself and the red-haired prince on the dais. He knew now that he had welcomed his dreams of the Dark Goddess as a possible indication that there might be an avenue of escape from a life of harsh discipline, in which he and his comrades were denied all natural urges toward pleasure and luxury.

Prince Brail untwisted his hand from the bright hair of the slave girl at his feet.

"Conduct this man to our private detention rooms and see that he is entertained as befits his character. We may have later need of his services as a pilot and he is no lover of the Horde," said Brail and laughed.

THE bright - haired girl, small and slender, with a laughing, mischievous face like a precocious child's, sprang to her feet and held out her hand to Lori, who took it submissively and let her draw him out of the room, followed — he observed through narrowed eyes — by a uniformed guard. Down a corridor and a long flight of stairs the girl led him, to stop before a great door which the guard opened. She gave the young pilot a gentle push over the threshold and then the door clanged shut and he heard bolts snapping into place.

He looked about with interest for the room was not a cell but a large, well - furnished apartment, simple but comfortable. A table stood at the farther end, bearing the remains of a plentiful meal, and about it on divans reclined half a dozen gorgeous beauties, as well as two men who turned at his entrance and now hailed him with shouts of welcome. He recognized two members of the crew from his own ship.

He laughed softly to himself as he saw and understood the somewhat vacuous expressions on their faces. Like himself, they had been in continuous action with the warring Horde for a period of several years and women had played a small and obscure part in their lives, although consequently a greater part in their minds. Thrown abruptly into the company of these harem beauties clad in filmy draperies and sparkling with gems, his comrades had found themselves somewhat at a loss at the liberality of their cap-

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tors, who apparently asked no more of them than to eat from that bounteous table and make love to those voluptuous women. They simply could not explain the situation, although they had naturally found it very pleasing.

Badi, blue eyes a-sparkle, sprang from his divan with a veritable barrage of queries.

"Where have you been, Lori? Has the Red Prince questioned you? Look at those girls! Pity they don't speak our tongue but they seem willing to learn. Why are some of Horde's captured men housed so splendidly, fed so well, given such delectable beauties for their entertainment? Answer me that, my Lori, if you can."

THE dark, serious-faced youth on the other divan shook his head with grave misgiving obvious in his expression.

"It smacks of something so strangely unlike our own methods with prisoners of war that I do not like it." He stopped short, then stated again, "I do not like it at all."

Badi shouted derisive laughter.

"Dirli is suspicious of all but torture," he roared. "Me, I am satisfied to have the red-haired prince take a look at my head and throw me — not to the lions, but to the ladies."

The dark youth continued to scowl portentously.

"Instead of the usual questionings under torture, this mysterious luxury," he muttered. "It's entirely unnatural."

"Forget it, Dirli. It may be that the Helgonian prince has an idea that we can be more useful to him if he treats us well than if he puts us to the torture," Lori suggested, his heart heavy at the recollection of the unwitting betrayal he had made under the influence of the powerful electrical contrivances of the ruler of Helgo. "I do not really know whether he is saint or devil, but I am assured there is more behind his forehead than a vacuum. If he plans to use us, he would not begin by making us hate him."

"Hate him? Ha, when he has treated us like visiting ambassadors? I for one prefer his kind of treatment to the life our own people have forced us into," Badi declared with emphasis.

Lori's black eyes sparkled.

"So you, too, are not in love with your place in the armies of our Horde," he accused lightly.

Badi shrugged his shoulders with a careless air.

"What is the use of trying to conceal what these slave girls can read in our minds, even if they cannot talk with us?"

Lori recognized the helmet his comrade lifted from the divan in explanation.

"It works. I've tried it out," Badi explained. "They can't understand our language, but they can read our emotions as reflected in my mind and I can read theirs. It is like pictures."

"Look out for the toys a captor gives his prisoners," warned Dirli portentously.

"Dirli hasn't used his helmet yet," grinned Badi.

"It is well for us to learn what we can about these people and this place, Dirli," the pilot said decisively. "It is all very mysterious. Put the cap on one of the women and let us see what it's all about. I'll wager you've both been too busy making love to think about our situation."

Dirli asked, a curious glint in his eyes: "Aren't you tired yet of high efficiency?"

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"If this kind of prison life is to be our future lot, I'll not be the first to quarrel with it. As for efficiency, when its applied so agreeably to our own personal problems, it may not be such a poor thing, Diril."

"Badi is right," Lori agreed.

"Of course I am," Badi laughed. "This is like a dream heaven."

"I AM sick to death of efficiency when it uses us like tools of little value and permits us no personal life," Lori went on.

"Well, so am I," Dirli growled, "but I'm suspicious—"

"Of what? None of us seem overpensive at our imprisonment."

"Let us be efficient enough in our own interests, for the first time in our lives, comrades, to learn all we can of Helgonian character and customs, and see how we can apply our knowledge to freedom from the Horde's hard discipline which has always held us down and forbidden us the least real joy in life."

"I'm with you, Comrade Lori," Dirli said more cheerfully. "I'm sick of inaction and ignorance of our real situation."

"You, Badi?"

"Of course, of course, I'm with you."

"I want to live like a man, not a mere fighting machine," Lori said sharply. "You both know as well as I that in a few days at most the victorious Horde will sweep over this place. We will be back on a ship and off on some other expedition against another peaceful planet. We must somehow manage to escape."

"Nothing but death will reward us if we continue with the Horde. Our leaders are drunk with conquest. Our lives are of little moment to them. Why do they fight unendingly? What is the goal of their ambitions?" Badi asked puzzled.

The three men stared blankly at each other without speaking for several minutes. It was perhaps the first time they had actually questioned, other than in their most secret thoughts, the significance of the Horde's years of conquest. Those rulers whom they had never seen, yet whose lightest whims became the commands that pressed upon each co - ordinator and through him to his own group of men, what were those rulers?

"Give me that cap," Lori demanded.

He gestured to the nearest of the slave girls, all of whom lay supine on their divans, watching a scene they could not understand. He gave her the cap, motioning her to don it. She placed it on her head, took his hand and led him to a divan, where she sank into the luxurious cushions, drawing him down beside her. She gazed, as did he, at her thoughts displayed in beautiful, slow-drifting pictures between them in the misty cloud that formed.

She thought of her childhood on a Helgonian farm; her development into a lovely maidenhood; her seizure one night by a party of armed slavers, her sale in the secret slave market of Helgo, and her delivery to the Fat Ones. Lori flinched at the portrayal of wild debauchery under the stim rays that followed.

Badi and Dirli stood watching the pictures of that evil life that lay beneath the surface of Helgonian placidity; the never - ending indulgences of the fat secret rulers with their cruel, crazed minds. They stared at the girl's suddenly determined face as she leaned toward Lori appealingly and pictured the wretched truth of the murders by those rulers of the best minds in Helgo lest some upright prince might penetrate their secrets and

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betray them successfully. All this the girl showed the three Hordemen.

THEN she showed how she had offended by holding back against the degrading, habit-forming stim rays; her failure to be sufficiently responsive to the Fat One's sensuality; her obvious lack of desire of those degenerate bodies of her masters. There followed her resale, as the masters tired of her coldness. Her appeal to Prince Brail, the puppet ruler, was shown, and how he had placed her here until he could find a suitable use for her. Clearly there stood out through all the visions the slave girl's admiration and respect for the red-haired prince of Bersalt. The girl removed the helmet when she had reached the end of what, had she had the ability to speak their language, would have been her recital to the three Hordemen.

Lori had begun to see into the situation shrewdly.

"This prince, comrades, is not a happy man. He rules, but only as a helpless puppet in the hands of the hidden masters of Helgo. I do not believe he wishes us ill; I am sure his intentions are quite the contrary. He may prove a friend in need, if we meet him frankly and honestly, as three men who no longer desire to be mere tools for the schemes of the Horde rulers."

Badi growled: "We have never seen our rulers, Lori. What if they, too, are degenerate madmen like these Helgonian rulers?"

"That may well be," agreed Dirli darkly. "Have they ever permitted us any diversions that might distract our minds from their wishes? Perhaps they are holding secret pleasure apparatus also, as these Helgonian secret rulers are doing."

Badi's resentment showed plainly in his next words.

"They force upon us a life of endless effort and Spartan denial under their policies and deny us anything that might dull the edges of their perfect weapons. Why have they wanted us to be their perfect weapons? Perhaps it is only to make all of space safe for the satisfaction of their monstrous appetites, to chance as little as possible the loss of their grasp on their endless pleasures."

"If that is the goal of the Horde's drilling and warring, to preserve to some fat idiot his sensual amusement with the bodies of the common people's women, why must we let ourselves be sacrificed when we get nothing whatever out of it all, for ourselves?" Dirli demanded forcefully.

LORI was silent, his thoughts busily engaged upon the endless and diverse amusements of those mad rulers. He thought how infinitely to be desired was this stimulation and the beneficial ray which made the users strong and healthy. He understood for the first time, it seemed to him, what life was about. Life with such apparatus was infinitely richer than life without it. Rage began to burn within as he sensed intuitively that the Horde's rulers undoubtedly also possessed such pleasures in which they indulged at will while denying even the knowledge of them to the men who gave up every luxury to the code of the Horde — 'simplicity, obedience, sacrifice, victory for the Horde.'

"To hell with the Horde!" he raged aloud in savage fury. "The Horde is a tool, a dupe of a crooked bunch of supremely selfish paunches back on the home planet. We've been fools, men, fools."

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Dirli joined in, "I've suspected for some time that the Horde's growing power through the centuries has been fostered as the dupe of a clique too self-centered to give its soldiers even a taste of this infinite pleasure in which they wallow like fat hogs themselves. The Hordemen have been taught to deny themselves women, for fear women might divert their energies from the services of the Horde's masters and their ideals. One for all? Bah! It's 'For one, all.' What a stupid dolt I've been."

"I for one do not intend to return to the ranks of the Horde," Lori announced with determination. "I shall not submit my mind again to the co - ordinator with his fierce loyalty. If I am captured and refuse to re - assume my old duties, it will be prison for the rest of my life, or torture to the death. Comrades, there is no return for either of you if you feel as I do. We must escape from Helgo but we must also escape from the Horde."

Badi pondered: "Do you think the red - haired prince might accept our services? Somehow I feel his intent is fairer, more honorable, than any other ruler I've ever heard of."

Lori looked thoughtful.

"If he is serving ideals that make for a wider life for common people, then I'm for him," he said at last.

Dirli grunted assent.

THE captive women, long used to the excesses of the love orgies of the hidden ruling class, were much amused and attracted by the innocence and backwardness of the three Hordemen in matters of love. Exposing to each other the inmost recesses of their minds, by means of the thought cloud mechanism, they soon knew each other more intimately than could have been possible in any other way. In the understanding of each other thus formed lay a strong base for a growing friendship and between two of the couples genuine love based on admiration and understanding came into being.

Days fled swiftly, those few precious days that were to pass before the Horde over - ran Helgo. There was nothing for the captives to do but talk, eat, sleep and make love, or probe one another's minds with the thought machine. For the Hordemen the idleness was a foretaste of heaven. Then what Lori had been expecting came to pass.

One day when the soldier of Helgo who acted as servitor and provided their table came into the room, he was followed by an officer who cried out that Helgo had fallen and the prisoners were free men. Upon the heels of this announcement entered Prince Brail, the red - haired puppet ruler, attended by the bright - haired impish maiden who was his favorite and constant companion.

Mirrla spoke to him softly in the Horde tongue but not too softly that the three Hordemen could not overhear.

"My lord, they are ripe for your plans. They are fed up with the Horde. They understand now what its nature must be."

"Men," said the prince, "our overstuffed, demented rulers have fled before the oncoming Horde. They would have been glad to have slain me before they left, because I have failed to defeat the Horde, but they feared to take the time it would have required.

"I have long wanted to escape from them and set up a government of my own elsewhere, a little more to a decent man's liking than this has been. To this end I have

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secretly had several great ships built, much faster than anything else in space, and I have lied about them to the rulers, stating that they were defective in design.

"My plans are carefully laid. Those men who are loyal to me are now in waiting in my ships. Everything is ready for swift flight to some distant planet, there to live as men should live, not as slaves to demented, devouring bellies, as we have been and as you Hordemen have been, whether you know it or not.

"I have need of your knowledge of the Horde to help me evade their far-flung posts; need of your knowledge of space and navigation; need of your knowledge of the Horde's science and methods. Will you join me? You have little to lose. Your life with the Horde has not been entirely to your liking, I have learned. I offer you a fresh life with rich reward."

LORI lost no time in indecision. This offer was the answer to his problems. His assent was fairly drowned in the shouts of his two comrades.

"Aye! We have had enough of war and endless sacrifice. We acclaim a leader who remembers to award his men their just dues, a leader who does not hide from us, but whom we can see and know."

Mirrla was laughing at their enthusiasm.

"See, my prince, how you are trusted immediately. It is because men sense your sincerity at once."

"Your strength and your understanding are accepted," smiled Brail.

A stir sounded in the corridor without. Brail turned — "Prince Kosin, I thought you had fled with Lord Onil?"

The soft, voluminous, silk swathed body of one of the hidden rulers waddled into the room. In his hand he held a dis ray gun. Behind him stood two of the palace guard, weapons leveled.

"So, Prince Brail. There is more to the Horde than these three impressionable idealists. I have long been a spy in the pay of the Horde and I may tell you now that you are not going to escape to make trouble for my so generous employers. Lay down your weapons. You must await our new rulers. Prince Brail, you are my prisoner."

Lori, standing momentarily stunned, noted a wink pass between Brail and the guards and knew that no love was wasted by common men on 'The Fat Ones.' Brail stepped closer to the huge Kosin, saying in a low voice:

"Don't be hasty, my Kosin. Perhaps we both will be relieved at the change."

But Kosin's hand tensed on the trigger, his shrill voice a bit worried —

"One more step, Brail, and I'll puncture that body your girls dote on so full of holes—"

AT THESE words, Mirrla, frightened beyond control, flung herself at Kosin, clutching the deadly dis ray with both hands. The dull thrum of its discharge sounded from her breast and a smoking hole appeared in her back. But both Lori and Brail had swung into action, heedless of the leveled weapons in the hands of the guards. Lori hit the fat carcass in a diving tackle hip high, almost simultaneously Brail's broad red fist smacked him between the eyes. Blood gushed from his nose as he fell to the floor, rolling over with Lori on top, his fat hands feebly struggling to keep

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the gun from Lori's wrenching hands. The guards, torn between long knowledge of and regard for Brail, and the sudden new assumption of power by the hated Kosin, stood in dumbfaced non - interference, their true desire for Brail to win the struggle holding them helpless. Then from the floor Lori bellowed, Kosin's weapon now in his hand.

"Don't shoot, this fat beast is a born traitor to any tie. Brail is worth a thousand of him. We will take him to the Horde rulers ourselves and get the credit for his capture."

Brail's hands were buried in the fat folds of Kosin's neck, and the guards stood looking at the gun in Lori's hands and quietly enjoying seeing a Fat One gasp his life out at last. It was a good omen for the future, their faces plainly said. Brail's hands did not release that neck until the last quiver had died from the soft form. Brail knew men. Then he arose and looked closely at the two guards.

"I do not know you men well, but I surmise that you would like any change that relieved us of the presence of these 'Fat Ones' as you men call the secret rulers. Well, that change has come but I am not able to stay. I have my way of escape also open. If you have been in the pay of the Horde's spy you might stay safely, otherwise you had better come with me. Quick, what will it be? I liked your behaviour here; it was wise of you not to go too far in aiding that monster."

"We will follow you, Brail, we know a few things, too. Nothing will be safe here for a while. You are a good man for those you approve of. You are not unknown." Their faces lost that dull expression a man acquires from standing guard for long hours each day, and acquired a canny, knowing look. "Lead on, we will not get in the way."

BRAIL caught up the body of Mirrla, and raced down the corridor, the five men following. They entered an elevator, descending uncounted floors, deep into the ancient foundations of Bersalt. Here the ancient stones fell away before Brail's wrenching hands, revealing a hidden flight of steps leading down into the dark. Deep within lights glimmered. As they emerged, they saw a row of launching cradles, their ships pointed up the vast tubes of rock that slanted toward the distant surface. These were the ships which Brail had told the rulers were defective. Their tubes glowed dully, and the gray soft steam of disintegrating water eddied about the cavern.

In seconds they were aboard, standing before the great space-range visi-screen, watching the still battling remnants of Helgo's fleet far above them in the night. The long needles of Helgo flashed between the groups of stubby, broad ships that were the standard battle-wagon of the Horde. Their mighty rays blazed in broadsides, but ever another of the few remaining obstacles to the conquest blazed up into a fierce white flare—dropped slowly, then faster and faster—a dull red hulk of death—toward Helgo far beneath. It was a gallant last stand of individual ships against the perfect maneuvering and flexible tactics of the Horde's unifying multi - head control devices and vastly outnumbering ships.

"Dying, damn it—because they trust me," muttered Brail — and bringing the flagship into focus on the tele-transmitter he bellowed into

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Commander Urdil's weary and startled face.

"Surrender, man, there is no use in more death. There is no way to win. The 'Fat Ones' have flown, and I'm on my way."

THESE ships lay deep under Bersalt. They had been long a building and incorporated in them was every advantageous device Brail could collect from the ends of the Empire. Immensely faster and more powerful than the standard battlewagon—they were yet more compact and smaller over-all.

It was this improvement and the speed advantage which it gave him upon which Brail relied for his escape from the Horde and from his hated overlords. His chance at a new life depended upon this time between the ruler's flight and the Horde's entrance into Bersalt. His plans had been long in the building and Lori realized what a tender heart the puppet ruler had, for by commanding the fleet to surrender he had cut his escape time by hours.

There were five of those glistening beauties of ships, slim and virginal, lying in their cradles, never flown before that day of escape. The launching tunnel slanted steeply upward to the night far above. The ships had quarters for several hundred and Lori calculated that in all there must be about two thousand individuals in the little expedition. He surmised that everyone who had been close to the Prince in Bersalt and who had real regard for him, must be aboard one or another of those five ships.

The five ships blasted off and flashed skyward in the very faces of the Horde, for a moment their hulls glowing cherry red from the rays of the enemy—but they were still too distant.

Brail's voice sounded suddenly in Lori's ear.

"Better get up there on the bridge. If there is anything you can tell them about the Horde ships' speed or their tactics, do so. Take my ring; if they question you, show it. They will listen to you if you show them the ring. I shall be up there as soon as I can, but I have something important to do first."

LORI put the ring on one finger and strode away to the bridge. The commander was standing there when he arrived and told him that they were being pursued although not by the standard battlewagons of the Horde fleet. It was three of those mysterious ships of the Horde that followed always on the heels of the fleet, directing operations and exhorting the men of the fleet, but never revealing to them their persons. What those leaders might be like was a subject of much speculation among the men of the Horde, but now that Lori had seen what the secret rulers of Helgo were like, as revealed by the minds of the slave girls, he had no doubts as to the nature of those who had so recently been his own rulers.

They were undoubtedly the lascivious degenerate descendants of the ancient ruling clique of the Horde's home planet Latno, concealing their deformities and their possession of the pleasure mechanisms behind the facade of idealism which the Hordemen had been bred to accept and work for. That these mystery ships were much speedier than the ordinary heavy armored battleships Lori knew and so advised the commander, who smiled, seeming unalarmed. Three ships were trailing them doggedly and ever in their ears dinned the message on the audiphone; "Surrender or die. Helgo has

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fallen."

Commander Goldr merely shrugged his heavy shoulders indifferently to these radioed orders, and Lori realized that the distance between the virgin fleet and the pursuers remained static.

A hand was laid lightly on the young pilot's arm and he turned to see that Brail had come up on the bridge and was looking into the vision-screen at the pursuing ships.

"Blast them, Commander. We have led them far enough from the rest of the fleet. Not so fast, are they? Give them death and be free of their pursuit. Then we'll turn on full speed."

To the young pilot the prince added in an aside: "You will see now what I could have done to the Horde had I so desired. But if I had used my power, I would still be in the clutches of those hated Fat Ones who held Bersalt under their death rays. The people will be better off under the Horde's rulers than under the Fat Ones. My only chance at freedom and the building sometime, perhaps, of a new government, was to lose the battle to the Horde. I took that chance. Now we shall see what the future holds for us in goodly living."

BRAIL gestured to the pilot to watch. Presently Lori saw a shimmering, blue-green finger whip out of one of the ship's guns. It was a ray he had never seen before. It touched the following ships, one by one, gently. For an instant they glowed brightly as if freshly painted with a great green brush. Then they yawed wildly, one way, another, obviously with nobody at the controls.

"What has happened?" demanded Lori with burning curiosity.

"Go with the boarding party if you wish, Lori. You may learn something about your precious Horde rulers that will make you more surely than ever my man. You'll find Badi and Dirli below. Take them along."

Lori's curiosity was at fever heat. Now, thought he, he would discover what his rulers were like. For years he had seen the powerful masterships trailing the war fleet and wondered what masterful creatures of great intellect and intense training they might contain. Now he would know whether his former idealism as to the Horde's great virtue was well founded or whether his recent furious anger at what they had kept concealed from their own loyal men were the correct criterion of their character. He would know them for what they really were, let him once see their mode of life. Whether or not they indulged in the never-ending pleasure spree he had seen in the slave girls' minds or whether they too lived on the Spartan simplicity of the Horde's code, that would tell him all.

A dozen compact trip-ships took off from the five vessels of Brail's fleet a few minutes later and on one Lori had gone aboard with Dirli and Badi. The trip-ships sped through the void to the enemy's helpless craft that were driving now in dizzily erratic circles. Lori was first to emerge from the air lock, a needle gun in his hand.

Now, the continuous electrical stimulation which had taken place in the ruling classes in the past centuries of their secret indulgence had resulted in curious changes in the germ plasm—generation after generation—the children of the hidden rich had been successively different—so different that the things they found in that ship were not men at all, but curiously distorted caricatures of men, hardly recog-

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nizable as such.

So, what B23X, or Lori, stepped into was a ship full of horrible creatures, lying dead in the midst of the choicest loot of a hundred planets.

As a consequence of the continual excitation of the nerve centers from earliest childhood, they had grown out of all proper proportion of the body, yet the cruel faces and thin lips belied all the natural implications of sensuality inherent in such a condition. The bandy thin legs, the pot bellys, scrawny necks and sunken chests were partially a result of their completely sedentary life. Several of these Horde leaders were women, if such distorted caricatures could be called women. Certain it is they were no advertisement for the hereditarily beneficial results of indulgence in artificial pleasures for centuries. This revolting appearance was reason enough for the secrecy and mystery surrounding them, Lori realized. The locked doors of several rooms opened to reveal the poor creatures of their pleasure—children chosen for their beauty and strength, and trained for years in every perversion—in every intent toward sensuality—until they were the things desired—a creature whose every impulse is toward bodily pleasure. For there is that about electrical stimulation of the pleasure nerves—it overwhelms natural impulses when ignorantly handled, replacing them with a wild, automatic, hypnotic energy to the exclusion of any effort in any other direction. It was this which Brail most deplored about the ignorant abuse of such inventions. In wise hands they would have been an immense enhancement of the beauty and pleasure of life—a force to build a greater appreciation of beauty and effort toward a richer life—a tool toward an ever richer variety in pleasure. But in the degenerate hands of the mad rulers it was a totally corruptive force resulting in a mad obsession.

THESE pleasure stimulants had originally been built as beneficials, to make the whole physical apparatus of the parents that bore the future race stronger, to grow a saner, sweeter, healthier child, but seized long ago by the monopolists and used far beyond the load limit they were designed for, the result had been a disastrous degeneration in the germ plasm of the families using them. All this Brail had long known and Lori deduced as much as he looked around at the gross distortion of the bodies of the masters and the beautiful but over-developed bodies of their pleasure slaves.

One of Brail's officers paused at the threshold of the room and Lori called, "Ought we to heave this carrion out of the air lock?"

"I think not. I believe our prince has a use for them. You'd better turn in, Pilot Lori, and get some sleep. You may yet have to take a trick at the controls; we haven't many good space pilots. We are mostly from the land forces, you see. I'll be on my way. I'm looking for technical papers. If you see anything of that kind, let me have them at once."

The boarding parties were now functioning as prize crews on the three captured vessels and Lori selected an attractive cabin from which he carried out three dead slave girls, and then turned in on silken soft cushions, such a bed as he had never sunken into before. It seemed to him that he had just slipped off into a doze when he was awakened by a laughing voice and opened his eyes drowsily to find the red-haired prince smiling down at

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him.

"You've slept two hours, my new friend. I have some very interesting things to show you, as well as many questions to ask. If you will give me an hour or two, you may then return to your slumbers, although why any man should sleep with all these beautiful women around, is a puzzle to me," grinned the prince.

"But there—I had almost forgotten that you are still a natural man. Come along!"

"Right with you, Chief," cried Lori, bounding to his feet, and feeling a new and curiously inspiring surge of friendship and loyalty to this man, almost a stranger yet so frank and open with him.

Brail strode ahead into the main salon, a huge lounge full of strange apparatus furnished with numerous large divans, each with wires leading to the apparatus. There were several bodies still lying where they had fallen when that powerful blue-green ray had whipped them into oblivion.

"Watch closely, Lori, and you will learn much that may be useful later on."

SEVERAL of Brail's physicians and surgeons were working over one of the monstrously misshapen corpses. Wires were attached to bands about his wrists, ankles, head and waist. Above him and shining down upon him were a battery of green rays. All at once a shudder shook the body. One of the medicos nodded to an assistant who threw a switch at the side of the lounge. The doctor then picked up two shiny electrodes and placed them on the breast of the thing, over its heart. The green ray made the flesh translucent and within the chest Lori could see the heart suddenly contract, then expand. The medico lifted the electrode, the heart stopped. He applied them again and the heart contracted and began to beat. The doctor lay down the wires and began to release those from about the limbs of the thing. A living body, but lately a corpse, was lifted from the table and placed on a nearby couch, while another corpse was placed on the table for treatment.

"Can you do this for Mirrla?" Lori inquired, hardly believing his eyes.

"Yes, my friend. Mirrla still lives and will soon be her old bright self. This is one thing I particulary wanted you to see, that this science, of such immense value to medicine, has existed for a long time. Yet it has been kept from our peoples by this mad clique, this misbegotten spawn of a defective stim current, for purely selfish and foolish reasons. I wanted you to see that the same hypocrisy and cruelty is shared by the government of your Horde with the recent rulers of Helgo.

"Every cell in the body is a battery as well as a storage place for the current it evolves. It is possible to build batteries which are almost precisely similar to these cell batteries of the body. Now, this current which the nerve cells carry about the body are of several kinds, all of them to a certain extent bearers of as well as currents of command, which are also currents of power to the muscles. By slightly varying the makeup of the batteries, as well as by simulating thought commands by means of a thought record, a variation of impulse organ can be built which simulates the functions of the mind over the body.

"Chiefly this organ has been used as an instrument to command the body to fructify and to furnish the powers to feel greatly the nerve stimulus accompanying such bodily functions. This type of apparatus

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is the pleasure machine which has so debauched and deformed these creatures through generations of misuse. It could be a gate to heaven, but in ignorant, evil hands it has proved the door to hell. Carefully constructed, these batteries would be wholly beneficial and nutrient in nature; even their prolonged use would result in better functioning and strength of the nerves and organs, which would in turn have resulted in stronger, saner, more beautiful children.

"BUT the ruling cliques saw a beautiful opportunity for selfish action long ago when the apparatus was first invented, so slew the originators, seized the apparatus, and made copies of it for such of their friends as were able to pay the fabulous price. The result of their ignorant monopoly was that the batteries were improperly built, incorrect acids were added to strengthen the output, and the variance in the current from that which the body cell creates resulted in this horrible distortion of their bodies and characters. Their children became more cruel and greedy, more lustful and less understanding of true pleasure."

"These horrible creatures are men, or were?" questioned Lori.

"They are animals, different from men in many ways. That thing we brought back to life is in truth the child of an artificial electric current which has subtly rearranged the inner chromosome and determinants which a child inherits from its parents; he is a child of an ignorantly built force, made by an imitator. This result was originally feared by the inventor, who took steps that his work should not come into general use until all the possible variations of the currents had been created and their results on the physical makeup of the people using them studied and understood. This was broken up and stopped when they were murdered by monopolists who could not understand the intricate and various dangers inherent in such delicate machinery.

"I have secretly come by information from people who had studied this sort of work, and carefully in private hid these current variants and nerve command generators; who have lain hidden about Helgo since the degenerates gained power. Their knowledge I gathered.

"Some of my men have mastered much of the art of creation of which heretofore only the involuntary organs of the body were capable. Thus it was possible for these men to sew up the fatally torn heart of my little friend Mirrla, run one of the wound currents which contain ions of healing nutrient such as only the blood ordinarily bears, to keep flowing through her body waves of energy-sustaining components, and flows of the bits of magnetic force which hold all matter together, to start her torn heart beating again, to heal her wholly and anew and return her to my arms in perfect health.

"You see, Lori, how it has paid me to keep trying even when all trying seemed useless. Such men as I have here exist nowhere else in space, perhaps, yet their work is but the logical development from the facts of life, apparent in the mere existence of such machinery as will artifically make a living body function against its own will."

"I BEGIN now to see what you mean when you say you wish to build a new world, a new kind of civilization, Prince."

Brail smiled.

"Now I shall show you what lies

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in their crooked minds. You are going to be astounded, amazed. Having always possessed thought reading mechanisms, they have never found it necessary to think for themselves. Look here," and he placed the metal cap with which Lori had already become familiar upon the head of the revived monster.

The thing's thought took form in the luminous cloud. It was a reaching, a questing, as of some primitive life like a leech reaching for the gill of a fish to draw blood. That was all there was in the creature's mind, a strange groping as of a man suddenly gone blind.

"Watch now," Brail said. "This girl here was his particular and valued perversion, his slave for long years. See now!"

Another cap was placed on the beautiful head of a slave girl who lay bound to a nearby couch. Instantly the thought cloud became the apparently normal mirror of the thoughts of a sane person, yet the character was that of the monster, for Brail questioned, "What would you do with us if you were free to wreak your will upon us?"

Within the cloud the picture of themselves, Brail the foremost, began to form. The picture visioned them as being bound and hung from ropes attached to hooks in their shoulder muscles. It showed their bodies torn by red-hot pincers; it showed pain impulse rays played on them; it showed the distorted faces that emitted shrieks of agony which were keen pleasure to the thinker. All this took place in the thought - cloud as a result of the question.

"Now watch the thought screen as I remove the cap from this monster's head. Only the slave girl's thoughts may be visioned now. What would you do," the prince asked the girl, "if you were free to do with us what you would?"

THE response was totally different now. The girl was a lonesome lost soul, whose expression seemed to ask for friendship and love and upon its refusal, as she seemed to think it would be refused, she bade them a sorrowful farewell and in her thoughts the Helgonian ships receded rapidly into space, leaving her alone with the dreaded will of the master from which she could not free herself.

"You will observe, Lori, that the will power of these creatures resides in the batteries they use and resistance to a master will is overcome merely by turning a knob on the rheostat. Thus they rule the Horde by using the minds of others for their thinking, but spoil all this thought by adding their own detrimental will to the thought pattern, overruling its well - meaning logic with their own unconsidered ill will. They are in truth a form of parasite, not actually men, but things as low as insects which can only survive by using the bodies of others. This inherited art of the electrical current which is an artifical copy of the body-electric is their only tool, their only resource; in truth, the only functioning part of their bodies is the machine. Do you see what a horror these recent rulers actually are? How they take pleasure? What their lives?"

"It is too appalling for words," Lori exclaimed sickly.

To the monster Brail now addressed himself.

"We have captured you, O mighty one, and must soon slay you. It is our custom, however, to allow a condemned man some favor before he dies. What may be your request?"

The cap was replaced on the mon-

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ster's head and his wish was revealed in the thought cloud. He desired to take all the stimulation his body would bear before death, in the company of his favorite slave girl. The caps were left on the heads of the couple and their anticipation of the coming indulgence unto death was revealed in their pictured memories of similar orgies in which both had participated innumerable times, and in fact this stimulating indulgence of the machine had been their whole life heretofore.

The practiced fingers of the monster made the necessary adjustments to the instruments and wires from the intricate, organ - like apparatus, and the will - less slave girl was excited to a wild, convulsive state by the full power of the mechanism. The monster, whose body was also under the dominance of the stimulating current, was about to embrace her in a last bout to the death when the red - haired prince threw the master switch and stopped the current flow before the girl could be harmed by its power.

"I wanted to show you," said Brail to Lori, "that although this creature has used the girl as his instrument for mechanical pleasure for years, using her for every thought he thinks for the better part of her life, yet there is no real love in him for her, for he wished to kill her as well as himself. These artificial creatures are incapable of affection."

HE REMOVED the cap from the monster's head, the creature glaring malevolently at this frustration of his desired indulgence.

"Did you wish to die?" he said to the girl.

She shook her head in negation.

"Did your master know you wished to live?"

She answered, "Yes" and a faint reflection of her nearly atrophied self - will showed for an instant in the thought cloud, an impulse that said plainly, "Free me from this thing!"

"You are free, since that is your desire, poor creature whose will has been destroyed. Before long you will be more yourself, and mistress of your own actions. I need your knowledge, oh wasted woman, and you need no longer be a waste, but a will to live and make life what it should be."

The monster was struggling then in the hands of Brail's men, as the prince ordered that he be locked up in a rear cabin.

"Once away from their thought machines, their atrophied bodies impulses cannot give them energy for much thought. This is not a particularly dangerous situation unless they get hold of the apparatus. They know certain things, out of their practice and knowledge of the body electric's use, that may be helpful to my medicos in teaching them what **not** to do," Brail explained, laughing.

"Shall I be on duty here?" Lori asked distastefully, surveying the corpses.

"Better return with me to our flagship. Mirrla has asked for you. She is interested in you, not too much, I hope," the prince said archly. "I love the imp. She can wrap her fingers about a man's heart as can no other woman I have ever known. I warn you, beware of my jealousy," Brail laughed.

MIRRLA was half - sitting on a divan, supported by many silken cushions. Her face was pale yet

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and her eyes shadowed, but her mischievous laugh rang out as Brail and Lori entered the room. She pushed aside the tray from which she had been nibbling at tidbits.

"Dear lord, so you have brought me that big innocent! Aren't you jealous of my interest in him?"

She extended one hand to Brail, who took the small, warmness in his own hard palm embarrassedly. He could not get used to women, he decided, his face growing red, as he stammered:

"Considering that a short time ago you were obviously not among the living, your recovery has been swift."

"Brail can do anything," she replied serenely confident. "You have yet to learn how good and how wise my prince is. You are his man now, are you not?"

"After having seen the rulers of the Horde, how could it be otherwise?" countered the young pilot gravely. "I am with Prince Brail in his desire to build a better world. Perhaps some day we may find a way to free the people of the Horde from their peculiar lice."

Brail sat on the edge of the divan gingerly.

"Are you feeling well enough to talk with us a while, Mirrla? You see, Lori, I am like the Horde masters; I can't think without this imp near me."

Mirrla laid her free hand in the prince's red-furred fist and drew him down beside her with a swift kiss.

"The doctors said I was not to worry, as long as I remained in bed quietly for a week. What is your particular problem, my prince?"

"As you know, I had planned for this escape a certain refuge in the planets of a far-distant sun whose rays are the least poisonous of any suns free of what we call civilization which are within a single voyage distance. But Lori has told me somewhat of certain dreams, or what he has thought of as dreams, which I examined closely and know to be perception of a being in the dark place in space called the coal-sack."

"Dreams are all they seem to me," Lori explained.

"You are not the first man I have examined who has had those identical unconscious perceptions of mighty life in that dark part of space. Always that life seems to be calling to intelligent life elsewhere to approach it and learn. Now you and I understand what this means, from a knowledge of the mind; we know this life must exist there in space and that it is benevolent is apparent from the very nature of these perceptions.

"Does it not seem to you wiser for us to go to that place in space where there is a chance of obtaining powerful assistance for our altruistic plans, than to try to settle on planets so very near the influence of the swiftly increasing Horde? Our work would only be overturned in time by the Horde, I fear, but if we are lucky, somewhere in the coal-sack are beings which the Horde cannot overwhelm by numbers.

"It is this choice that troubles me. Shall we follow our original plans to settle on the planet of Bolra under the sun of Shurr, or shall we go in search of Lori's dark God or Goddess?"

"I remember an old maxim, my prince, that bids him who is in doubt as to two courses to follow both. Let us do both. Let us go to those new planets and settle our

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people. Then prepare your flag - ship with everything that will make it last through a long voyage, and go in search of that dark goddess of Lori's. Thus, you will not have put all the eggs into one basket," she smiled.

"You see, Lori, one cannot think without her. The wisdom that lies in that apparently merely pretty head is beyond me. We will do both, Mirrla." He rose from the divan. "Rest now, creature made for naught but silly love," he mocked tenderly. He bent to kiss her before he left the room, beckoning the pilot to follow.

THE prince's dark face was smiling as he addressed his next words to the young pilot, mischief underlying them obviously.

"Now I must warn that something very painful is about to take place in which you will play a large part. I shall not tell you what it is, save that it is probably due to your attractive moustache," he grinned. "At any rate, you are the first to undergo this new ordeal. I do not know what your decision is going to be, but a decision there has to be."

"Give me a hint, at least," begged Lori uncertainly.

"For years the masters of Bersalt have been collecting girls from all the lands and all the planets of the empire. Many of these I myself retrieved from death at their hands and most were left behind them when they fled Bersalt. The Horde masters also carried a harem with them on the captured ships and most of such girls have been revived.

"The preponderance of women in our expedition is not entirely due to my softheartedness where women are concerned; many of them are very capable and experienced with apparatus of which the ordinary man knows little. Most of the women, though extremely versed in the pleasures of love, have had none but their degenerate masters to practice their arts upon, so now the crews of your two Horde ships must choose mates from among them. As I have hinted, very likely due to that ridiculous moustache of yours, the women insisted that you have first choice."

"Gods!" ejaculated Lori, in obvious dismay.

"It will be quite an ordeal, I assure you," laughed Brail. "And now I must abandon you to it."

As he spoke he opened a door to the main salon of the ship, a spacious chamber, and pushed the pilot gently inside, then closed and locked the door.

THE room was crowded with women. They were the pick of two empires, the Horde's vast holdings, and the great empire of Helgo. They knew nothing of normal men nor of normal life but had been the creatures, the slaves of the demented rulers. To these women the young pilot was the fulfillment of a dream all lived in their secret hearts; a real man for a mate. The focus of all those longing eyes, Lori stood just inside the door, staring.

For years he had hardly seen a woman and woman hunger was a mad flame in his body, a terrible compulsion in his brain. These girls, most of whom were barely out of their teens, had been trained from early childhood in the art of woman's wiles accentuated by machinery, had been the harem beauties of the deformed monsters who were their masters. Clothes they were

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unaccustomed to, save filmy draperies; their only other adornments were jewels. They had seen no reason to alter their customary attire by assuming garments at this moment when their attractions might be so important to their future happiness.

So Lori stood staring almost stupidly at that throng of women, mostly clad only in draped veils, and in all their eyes was one question: How shall I make him choose me?

Two grinning warders approached the pilot and beckoned him to one end of the room where a great throne stood on a dais. Before him the thought cloud was activated and one by one the women donned the metal cap to show him their innermost thoughts, their very souls, so that he might choose wisely. Simultaneously they demonstrated their art of the nerve impulse generator control, so that through his body coursed all the varied pleasures which their lifelong practiced fingers could bring from the keys. Their thoughts and promises of future effort to please him showed constantly in the cloud as each demonstrated her art.

Some girls began with a dance, leading up to completely pictured fulfillment of love in the thought cloud. Some made dreams for him to show what dreams he would have if he were theirs. All the intricate art of the pleasure making to which they had been trained all their lives unrolled before him a vista of future love so utterly devastating to his love - starved manhood as to cause him to lose consciousness at times.

After each woman had fully exhausted her intricate repertoire, a girl who seemed to officiate as a chairman in the ceremonies would place on Lori's head a cap with a vita - meter attached, which took a reading of his desire. Lori observed that this reading was increasingly higher after each performance and wondered if it could be entirely fair, but soon it began to deviate up and down quite revealingly. This reading was noted beside each girl's name by the girl in charge.

HOURS later Lori staggered out of the great chamber, a man who realized at last what love and life could mean. To a man who had been unable to decide definitely upon any one woman, the readings indicated some dozen devastating darlings as his most attractive and probable final choice. The game would be continued on the morrow, he had been informed by one of the grinning wardens. The pilot had merely nodded despairingly, unable to speak.

In his wildest dreams he had never had such good fortune and that something would happen to destroy the promising future before he could live it he felt sure. This fear shouted at him as he groped his exhausted way to bed. This next day would be, he vowed, the last test, for he felt that the continued ordeal — if he did not decide on one girl — would completely wreck his nervous system. His dreams were fevered, processions of jewelled beauties, soft perfumed hair, lips irresistibly laughing, of long rounded legs, of beckoning, soft, rosy shadowed arms, of flashing eyes, a-glitter with desire.

Those eyes all said, "Take me! Take me!"

"Poor fellow," the girls were saying as they looked over the meter readings and the thought record they had taken unobserved, "he

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loves us all. He loves every one of us. How can he ever decide?".

"Let us be fair with him," counselled the chairman. "We have plenty of time, for it will be months before we arrive anywhere. Let us figure just which of us affects him most. Let us coordinate the meter readings with the record pictures. It will take many hours but it can be done. Then the woman who has most of that quality which moves him most, will get him."

THE following day the young pilot was ushered in again to face the strange and exciting ordeal. He found several more women than the dozen whom the meter readings had indicated as his choice, lined up for the finals. About the sides of the salon there were also lined up about a hundred of his Horde shipmates, undergoing the same tests at similar apparatus which the girls had brought in and set up.

As Lori seated himself, Brail strolled in, chuckling as he saw the expressions on the faces of the Hordemen. Several of these men cheered him as he entered and all throats took up the greeting. When there was silence again, a brawny captain of a warship stepped forward and made a speech.

"When we were first captured, we could not understand your kind of treatment of us. When you included us in your flight, we still could not explain your motives satisfactorily. But now that we have seen what our former masters have denied us while enjoying it to the full themselves, we want you to know that we feel no loyalty to the Horde any longer. I have talked with many of our men and most of them feel the same way. We are glad to have a chance to be your men. We shall at last have a worthy chief."

The prince replied that those were precisely the reactions he had anticipated.

"We have the opportunity to build a new kind of life," he told them. "Remember always what evil selfishness has made of life on the planets we know. A moiling misery topped by a monstrous group of idiots pandering to the lusts of a few at the expense of wretchedness for the rest. Let us never let that happen with us, while life gives us strength.

"Meantime, when you men have made your selections of a mate, you will learn something about our new marriage ceremony. It is strangely and infinitely more binding than the old, and the doctors tell us that it is not only psychologically very healthful but increases the pleasure one finds in a mate by a large multiple. We have a new method of insuring love which is very effective. You shall learn about it soon."

"I don't doubt that," muttered Lori to himself, staring about at the throng of lovely forms revealingly displayed.

Two of the girls who had pleased him most approached and seated themselves near his feet.

"It is time for the final tests. You must decide, lord, today."

Then began again the thought probing, the mental pictures from both their minds and his own appeared consecutively in the cloud, the meter readings were too nearly alike to be of much help in a decision. The fifteen remaining girls, some new entries, now danced, each the folk dance of her native country. Short and dark - haired, long - limbed and blonde, full - breasted Amazons and childlike women from the small planet Arfran, they were

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alike in their mastery of some particular type of dance, for all had been trained as children to dance, since dancers bring a higher price in the markets and these women had all been groomed for the slave market at least once in their lives.

THE dance eliminated half a dozen more, as Lori did not like their short legs. The remaining nine now submitted to meter tests of their mental desire for the pilot as well as to a meter test of the voltage of their minds, which was a fair index of intelligence, the higher the voltage in the mind, the more intelligent, is an invariable fact. The three highest in these two tests were the same women.

One was a beautiful red - head from Sama, a heavy planet whose people are particularly well - formed though a bit muscular for true beauty. This girl's strength was very great. Her skin was a whiteness unbelievable, her eyes a deep sea - green and Lori was the first real man she had ever laid eyes on in ten years of hateful servitude.

The second girl was she who had given Lori the goblet of wine when he first stood before Brail. Still weak from her long torture, she was trying desperately to win the pilot and his reading on her dark, sultry beauty was highest of all, but her own weakness kept her readings down below that of the others, else she would surely have been chosen.

The third girl was a very tall woman from Palas, of a greenish skin and white - blonde hair. Her beauty was startling. Her great brown eyes held a flame of desire no man could resist. Her pointed ears and floating hair; her full, high breasts, and wide hips, her long, rounded limbs and partly webbed hands with fingers twice the length of ordinary human hands were wizard - like on the keyboard of the nerve impulse organ. She stood before him like a weirdly beautiful statue in green and white, wearing the great pearls which were customary among her people in Palas.

Lori could not take his eyes off her as she took her dramatic pose. She was the woman whom he was sure had invaded his dreams for long and whom he had always loved. Nor did she move her eyes from his but kept her will to win him visible on her face, for she was wise in the ways of love and knew a man likes to be valued highly.

Yet when he glanced at the sultry beauty with her parted lips and white exhausted pallor, his heart smote him for disloyalty, for she had been kind to him and he felt sure he must love her. Then the knee - long waves of glorious red hair would sway before his dazzled eyes and his gaze would wander toward that strong, vividly white body framed in the beautiful hair; the big breasted strong - legged vitality would seize upon his imagination, the burning emeralds of her eyes would look into his, his knees would knock together and his breath choke. He told himself he could not make any choice between these three beauties; no man should be asked such a thing. So said the meter, as he glanced at the notes in the girl's hand and then looked up despairingly into her laughing eyes.

She leaned over to whisper in his ear.

I would choose the green. I know her worth. But if you still cannot make a choice, ask Mirrla. That is what the prince does."

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LORI sat in indecision and then the green woman spoke.

"I am one of those who lay in the ships of the master of the Horde. I have watched you through the eyes of the masters and through my own eyes on their vision - plates for many years. I have maneuvered the battleships through the minds of the coordinators, unknown to them. I have truly been in your dreams for many years, for I have watched over you and loved you since first you entered the services of the Horde. Do not deny me, Lori, for I have loved you long."

The red - haired beauty turned in a blaze of fury upon the tall green woman; green ice and red fire.

"You lie, you witch!" blazed the red - haired Titan, her strong legs spread, her hands clenched into fists.

"It can be proved through the thought cloud," answered the green one, her eyes a brown study in self control. "I have saved his life more than once and should have some claim upon it."

Lori was standing now, the fierce vitality in those two women, so startlingly different, so intensely alive, more than enough to bring any man to his feet.

The Horde captain who had addressed a speech to Prince Brail, spoke up.

"What the green one says may be true enough, Lori. Those rulers are in truth stupid and these women's brains, even under their stupid wills, have been our salvation more than once. Do not refuse her love, if she so desires you in very truth. Better men than you are waiting their turn and these other girls will not go unloved."

The green girl spoke.

"I know something of your dreams of the dark Goddess and I know, too, that there is more to those dreams than you realize. I have much to teach you and have desired you over - long. Ask that girl yonder; she was on the master ship with me and I have often confided in her."

Lori turned to the other girl the Green One had indicated.

"She speaks the truth, lord. Each of us slaves who was on duty at the vision - screens on the master ships had our loved one in the fleet. We could read their minds, and knowing that the whole set - up was so hopeless for them as well as for us, it was our only amusement to make life a little more beautiful for one of you. So we would set a watch upon the bellies at their pleasures and then amuse ourselves by giving our chosen one delightful dreams.

"You were her chosen one and for long years she has devoted every minute that the bellies weren't watching us, to your entertainment and development. It was her beneficial rays that made you so strong and beautiful: her thought which made you intelligent; her work which made you the man you are today. You cannot refuse her. She has in truth created you from the ignorant stripling who entered the Horde's services long ago. You owe the very strength in your arms to her, as well as the desire which lives in your loins. You would be as empty as poor Glak except for her care. You are in very truth her man.

"Go to her and thank her on your knees, if you wish to do everything as a real man would."

LORI could no longer deny that the young girl was voicing his

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own sentiments. He went down from the dais and walked toward the green beauty.

The wise, wide brown eyes drew him, the floating cloud of her fine hair spun gold about her shoulders. The tall pillar of other worldly beauty that was her body, so long the abused property of the mindless masters, had yet found a way to be his guardian angel. The woman who had flitted through his dreams, whom he had sought gratefully so many years, was she. The ice-maiden herself, the snow - queen of his dreams.

He dropped on one knee before her and took her extended hand, as he begged:

"Forgive me for not recognizing you. How could I have known you would be here? I know you now. You are Norla."

"You are forgiven, lord. I am sorry I spoke as I did but I could not help myself. These others are so beautiful that fear struck at me and I could not bear losing you after so nearly winning you.

"There is much I can teach you which they cannot. It is obvious from the test readings that you are as much attracted by my beauty as by theirs. Other things being equal, I could not have you choose someone who does not love you as do I."

THE lovely green witch Norla then suggested to Lori that he ask Prince Brail's permission to return to the ship on which she had spent so many years of her life. It carried a wealth of apparatus with which she was familiar from long use as she had operated it all under the super-imposed will of the masters. Also her quarters, the only home she had ever had, were on that ship. She had been one of the most-used "tools," for she came of a long line of scientists on her own planet and she had the advantage of a better education than most of the women could boast.

The masters had naturally fallen into the habit of using her brain for every important operation on the ship and she had often been commissioned to superintend new installations of machinery or major repairs. She was perhaps the best - trained brain in the use of the secret mechanisms in existence. Although it was possible that Prince Brail's scientists and medicos understood the theory behind those mechanisms better than she, they had too few of them to have had anything like her experience in their use. It was this last she meant when she told the young pilot there was much she wanted to teach him.

As they boarded the conquered Horde ship Norla called Lori's attention to the first device she intended to demonstrate.

"You know, of course, that a coil of wire about a steel bar will cause the bar to become permanently magnetized when a current is run through the wire. The current in the human body is of a similar nature and proximity of the male and female alone will in time cause an attraction to rise between the two which is in a way of speaking, a magnetic polarization of the cells of the body.

"There are other factors entering into the phenomenon of love, but the explanation would take up too much time at this point. Lie on this couch and I will place this silver coil about it. Through the coil," she explained, "will run the current from my body, augmented many thousands of times by the

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batteries and these tuning coils.

"The natural magnetism of love is permanently increased in every cell in the body, and since the current is attuned, is indeed manufactured by the cells of my body controlling those great synthetic body-cell current batteries, you will find yourself in love with me, and only me. Do you consent to this treatment?" asked Norla, her burning eyes on his.

Lori nodded, his mind lost in the memory of the dreams which this tall green woman had moved through so beautifully, always showing him some new wonder, always leaving him more intensely curious about the nature of life and love.

"Now you are mine entirely!" she exclaimed triumphantly, her wide mouth curving in a lovely smile, her teeth flashing white, her eyes now blazing yellow fires in her glowing face, and her hand swiftly closed a great switch above her head.

SHE had placed about her waist and breast two silver bands, which were connected by wires to the great instrument. These bands and the wide silver coil about Lori's body began to glow with rosy pale flames of energy. Through the pilot's body coursed a current of magnetism so strong that his every fiber shuddered steadily.

His eyes were on the green witch and his mind accepted that through his body was coursing the essence, the identical energy, that was her soul, her character. As he watched, every line of her body took on a new, gigantic meaning to him.

She said abruptly, "Tell me now what you see."

He said strangely, "I see a woman. . .

"I see a woman —" Lori's voice went on, almost chanting, "the curve of her high breast is now a saga of beauty. The light of her eyes, reflecting the rose glow of the coil in its yellow depths, has become a vast tongue of fire toward which my spirit aims like an arrow, my body a bow to send it, bent and ready. The long pillar of her waist, has become a stalk upon which grow three great hungry flowers, her breasts and her face, framed in the soft flame of her hair. Her long, sweetly-rounded legs are like two great pale pythons, two slaves of the witch queen above, and those slaves must always move toward me to save me from unbearable misery.

"A spell is born in me," he mused strangely, "from which I know I shall never be free. You are my will, yet only a god could want it otherwise. Life is worthless, at the cost of losing this reward."

Norla began to release him from the silver coils.

"Now you understand something of animal magnetism. This treatment should last for some months, and then I shall give you another."

She slit his tunic with her dagger, placed the silver bar from her breast about his own bared chest, as well as the other band about his hips.

"Now, when you throw the switch, my will becomes your property, as yours has become mine," she informed him.

She threw herself lightly upon the couch and replaced the bright coil about her long body.

"This marriage of ours will be one of actual binding magnetic force, not dull words from a priest. Throw the switch now. All is ready."

AS THIS strange and lovely creature bade, Lori did. About the coil now played not the rosy glow of

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Norla's vital force but a green blaze of virile nature.

"And what do you see, my Norla?" asked Lori, recalling the words wrung from him by the terrific attraction which had now made its permanent home in his body.

"I see a strong man whom I have loved for long and who is now truly mine. His voice, which has always aroused me, now rings in my ears like the magic of Pan himself. His chest, which I have just bared for the first time, is a great shield of strength, mossed with the black curls of the male and bearing the two red flowers of desire.

"His mouth, which has yet to taste my lips, is parted and waiting and so will it always be parted in anticipation of my coming.

"His waist is a pillar of dark strength to which is shackled my life. His arms are great serpents waiting to crush the evil out of my body and fill it with his pleasure,

"His legs are muscled movement which I shall watch all my life, bringing him to me or bearing him away.

"His strong, patient, sorrowful life has ever been my charge and now has become my reward for kindnesses unknown to him. He shall be sorrowful no longer for I bear his laughter between my own teeth. Presently I shall place the laughter in his mouth and there it will remain."

Norla's green body shuddered constantly with the flux of a mighty magnetic field, her hips writhed with uncontrollable desire, her eyes rolled toward his face and away for she could hardly bear to look at him.

Lori hastily released the switch, realizing her will to take more of the charge than was perhaps good for her. As he pushed back the great coil from the couch, Norla half rose from where she lay, but her head fell back on her shoulders, her long tapered neck arched sharply back to her round upward-thrust chin, her red lips opened over her gleaming teeth and her eyes burned hypnotically into his. All desire flamed in those eyes for him alone and Lori bent and his arms slipped about her, his mouth at last crushed hers, the crown of an ecstasy that became unbearable. The day went dark and he lost consciousness.

AS HE came slowly back he heard Norla's voice softly in his ears.

"You did not know that a kiss could make a strong man lose himself so completely, like a weak and silly girl, did you, my Lori? But so it can be and there is an infinity of deeper, vaster pleasure for us in store. Let us keep out of the clutches of the mindless masters who have crushed this life science in their inept secrecy. There is much yet to learn, my Lori. You have but tasted the first minute nibble of life as it can be under the science, as Prince Brail and some others like myself know it.

"Are you satisfied now that you have chosen Norla?"

"Witch, the red-haired girl was right. You are more than mere humanity," Lori cried ardently. "I am under your spell, nor would I wish it otherwise."

He drew her long, sweetly curved body up into his arms.

"Now show me your cabin, where you have lived so many years."

"Down that corridor, my Lori." She smiled subtly as her lover bore her toward it, unable to take his eyes from hers that laughed from her glowing face up into his own.

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THE little fleet sped on. The five speedier Helgonian craft were in the van, the slower Hordeships forming a rear guard; in case of an attack they would fight to the death while the five, bearing the original members of the expedition, fled that they might be spared to carry out their ideals.

Norla was constantly employed teaching Brail's technicos the uses and construction of the intricate and variegated machines, many of which were very old, used constantly by the Horde masters, who were too stupid ever to replace worn parts.

Lori's over-two hundred shipmates had chosen mates from among that throng of beautiful women and had begun to learn what life could be under intelligent and kindly leaders such as Prince Brail and his beautiful favorite Mirrla, who was considered the prince's consort.

Sitting before the great master visi-screen where Norla had sat so often for so many years, on watch over the fleet for the masters while they plunged into their insane debauches, Lori inquired curiously:

"Why did not the things love you, if you used that apparatus?"

She explained that they were so degenerate that they were incapable of love and the augmentation of their body electric only resulted in a greater, more intense loathing. They were in fact incapable of pleasure, but they did not realize this.

"The machines, when too old, give off a subtle detrimental which acts like an evil will and these creatures stupidly allowed themselves to become full of this soul destroying, artifical evil will, and their children were the products of this distorting force. They had inherited a mighty empire and the most wonderful science known to men, but their ignorance of the effects of over-use of this type of mechanism was their undoing.

"Let us forget them. We know what made them the horrible things they became, and we know how to avoid that evil by constant testing and upkeep of the machinery and batteries.

"We can build life anew by the use of the very science, the abuse of which made the rulers obscene failures.

"Before I overlook it, I want to show you a benefical ray which is also a nutrient, feeding the nerves and making you better able to feel the softness of my body. It is really also a pleasure impulse in its own right."

LORI hesitated. So much science, all of which he could not digest mentally so speedily was it given to him.

"How do you know it is safe to be used?"

Norla laughed.

"There are multitude of tests for that. One can sense evil in the vibrants, just as one can sense evil in a man. By augmenting its nature until visible to the mind, you understand. Then there is the test of the microbes." She held up a test tube as they stood before the apparatus. "This is full of ordinary amoeba, raised on beef broth. Under a microscope they are just tiny, not very active, ugly little things. I place these tubes in culture and in the current I run through them for ten minutes which is their life span, most of the amoeba are now under another generation.

"These I place under the microscope. You will observe that they are very active, much larger, and about

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them is a pleasing appearance; they have acquired beauty of a kind from the effects of the current. Does that not reveal sufficiently the beneficial effects of the current?

"Not I shall show you that by placing another tube of the same culture under this old, dust covered machine, which is identical with the one we just tested except that it is very badly worn, and then putting the culture under the microscope, the amoeba are almost inactive, and are misshapen, aborted creatures, with no beauty what ever. They are barely alive; no more."

"What has made the old machine go bad?" asked the pilot.

"Particles of disintegrant nature gather in the machine. After long use this turns the metal into a generator of evil force. It can also be tested by letting a little into your brain while you make pictures on the thought cloud. If the apparatus is still in good shape, the pictures should be beautiful and varied but if evil disintegrant forces are stronger, they become stupid, ugly, unvarying thoughts of ill intent.

"There are any number of such tests. That of the spectroscope for disintegrative elements reveals the condition invariably. Yet, due to the passive ignorance and selfishness of their fathers, these creatures were born to curse a hundred planets with evil rule."

Lori's arms went about her.

"What must be your natural intelligence, Norla, that kept you from falling into the state which the poor demented addicts I have seen had fallen into. How you must have resisted that terrible and constant invitation to debauchery which lay always here in your work with these mechanisms and under the evil will of those half-men. How your will to love truly kept you from sinking into that pit which was really the line of least resistance.

"I love you for that strength of will and purpose as well as for your cool green beauty that covers the fiery heart of you."

"You should also know, Lori that many a fairer creature than I sacrificed herself to keep my mind safe to care for the welfare of you and your men in the fleet. Often they invited the stimulation to keep it from me. It is a long life that I live, made up of many lives that gave themselves to keep me whole and because they loved such men as you in the fleet but were unable to care for their loved ones as was I.

"I have seen dozens of my companions go into insanity and worse than death just to keep me for a little while longer in life and sanity. You cannot understand the long and terrible battle for self-will and sanity I have waged, with the help of many devoted girls now either dead or gone mad.

"Thus it is that you hold many women when you hold me in your arms. Do not waste what they died to preserve."

Lori's lips suddenly touched her forehead in a tender caress.

"How I love you, Norla!" he whispered. "You are wonderful."

SHE gestured to the room in which they were standing, outfitted with many different types of apparatus.

"This room was my work-room," she explained. "In it all the determinants of energy are charged to a force set-up extremely favorable to life. I never told the degenerate rulers what I was working at and they were too stupid to ask its use or they would have appropriated my

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work. But many of the other women understood and spent much time in here.

"You may not have realized that Life and Growth are not the same. Growth is not always life, but life must have growth. Most matter is but a centralization of the products of disintegrance and much of the growth in life partakes of this process. The food for this growth in life does not all come from what we eat, but also out of space, the long-cold ash of the fires from all the suns. These are energy flames rich in their substances. There are several of them, all vitally necessary to life, just as proteins and carbohydrates et cetera are necessary in food.

"I have formed several great magnetic field lenses about the ship. They extend for acres about us, focusing this invisible ash, sub-atomic matter, into a small beam against these reflectors now set in the walls that look like decorative shields. Between these mirrors of force the rich flows from above are trapped and roll back and forth until their velocity is reduced to such an extent that the body absorbs these nutrient bits of stuff from which all matter is in fact composed.

"Here above my couch is the focus of all the mirrors. The varyingly attuned focusing fields throw here a rich mixture of invisible substances which causes life to become a thing beyond understanding to you, as yet. Watch while I step in the focus and you may understand why I am beautiful, although you know I must be old in years. In years I am old, yes, but these nutrient rays have made me younger and far stronger than any human being now alive," Norla said with pride.

As she spoke, she stepped up onto the center of the divan. At once the life in her glowed into new, tremendous flame. Her eyes shot forth beams of irresistible attraction. The muscles under the smooth green flesh crawled like prisoned snakes. Her mouth opened in a low laugh that held all the invitation of paradise.

Unable to resist the terrific life-spring of woman being that had suddenly manifested itself in her, he sprang up to the divan to her side. The terrific ecstacy of that focus of hidden life-giving force was the biggest thing that had ever happened to him, he knew instinctively. Every faculty, every sense, seemed heightened in power of a long multiple of its ordinary strength. There smiled into his newly all-seeing eyes a face, the face of his dreams, the face of all women who ever loved molded into one great strength of being. He knew Norla for his mate, for whom desire welling in him seemed beyond the power of flesh to contain, yet he lived, for new strength rose steadily in him, like life rising from a deep mother-lode of life.

He crushed her body to his and knew that such a mating could come to Gods only. He felt himself a god as compared to ordinary men; by the wisdom of the green witch he had been made super-human. Life was the secret of the Gods; the way to success, to grasp life was to feed life more abundantly, and the pleasure of this was the reward for learning such a simple truth.

THE green witch woman and her lover did not emerge from her chamber of tremendous secrets until over a week had passed. When he came out at last, Lori could not believe so many days had gone.

He could not fathom at first the

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awe with which his shipmates greeted him for his face, like Norla's, shone with godlight beauty and strength. In both their glances lived a fiercely vital something that had not been there before. Previous to this experience with her lover, Norla had never dared to use the force-focus for so long a time, she had feared the cruel rulers would have realized that she had something which they must take from her for their own use.

Encountering Badi for the first time since his new experience, Lori was taken aback when his onetime comrade saluted him with a respectful bow, and an amazed expression that was half awe.

Badi replied, when questioned: "Lord, you have become something more than mere man. This is unmistakable. I pay due respect to whatever it is that has taken possession of you and made you more than human."

A RADIO report from the young pilot to Prince Brail resulted in a hasty visit from the red-haired ruler, who asked that he be shown Norla's chamber immediately.

The green witch explained that the walls were of special reflective material from which the energy ash could not escape, once in, so that the beneficial pressure kept building, once the power was on.

Brail cried out, "What couldn't we do with a really efficient installation of this kind! It would be revolutionary. Men and life as we know them would become increasingly more god-like. Our new homes must each contain such a chamber. It will be your work, Norla, to oversee their proper building, on pain of punishment by this former Hordeman of yours," he added mischievously, "If you two realized what this energy focii has done for you both within such a short time, you would understand why I desire a great many such chambers with these wonderful devices."

Norla's eyes sparkled with anticipation.

"What a race of super beings we can make!" she agreed.

The prince stepped into the center of the broad couch.

"I do not intend to be out of such a chamber very often, in the future. Turn it on, Norla. Don't hold out on me any longer. It makes me impatient that I must wait, when I look at your youthful, bright faces. Shame on you, my girl! And me dog-tired," the prince complained, laughingly.

She said in a less assured voice, "It would do Mirrla worlds of good to take the treatment with you, prince."

"Good girl. Lori, get my little bundle of delight, will you? She isn't strong yet and this may be just the medicine she needs. Norla, will you call in my techs so that the principles on which this is constructed may be demonstrated to them? The sooner they understand that beneficial force can be concentrated in great strength, the better for us all.

"Our rays are so puny, yet they never have realized, my techs, that those rays could be powerful by strengthening, focusing, and better construction. When you get them here, give them a good going-over, Norla. They need the swelled head taken down a little, every once in a while."

In the course of half an hour Mirrla was borne in on an improvised stretcher by four of the former slave girls. She had been forbidden by the medicos to exercise, so did not try

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to walk, although she felt that she could if she chose. Brail sprang down from the couch, picked her up and carried her to the center of that great divan where the rays came to the strongest focus. There he stood, holding her in his arms and bidding her be silent although she tried to tell him something that she insisted was important.

"It is important, my prince. One of the Horde master's women has told me that some one of the Horde has read in your mind the secret of our superior speed. Your plans as to our future destination, even the course you had decided on taking, when we were at last safe from enemy observation, must be changed, because it has been radioed back to the Horde's fleet commander, at Bersalt. We will shortly be pursued by some of their ships that are as swift as our own and perhaps much better armed, if we delay."

BRAIL laughed and held the favorite's slight body closer.

"Fret not yourself, my Mirrla. Against such a contingency I have a choice of at least four different plans, tentatively under consideration in my mind. Which one they thought they read, I know. Space is vast, my girl. I shall plot an unpredictable course of zigzags, curves, toward a destination of which I no more than you are aware, except that it be far distant."

Norla interrupted.

"The Horde has an instrument which detects most minute quantities of gas in space. With it we can hunt down a spaceship as a hound scents a rabbit, by the smell of its exhaust on our instruments. Since they have ordered our ships pursued, they will continue the hunt, for seldom do the lazy idiot rulers rescind an order."

"What then shall we do, in your opinion?" asked the prince, curiously.

"We should lay several false trails while we yet have time, and then describe a perfect circle in space for several revolutions and shut off the rockets. Momentum will carry us beyond their ken on a tangent to the circle undetectable in any way."

"Wisdom is wisdom," quoth Brail, "Why didn't I think of these neat tricks?" he moaned plaintively, as he laid Mirrlas' body gently in the center of the huge couch and himself sprang to the floor. "I'm going to give orders immediately upon your suggestion."

IT WAS several hours later when the two couples stood in the bow of the largest ship that was Brail's, built expressly to suit him. They were listening intently with the ultra-sensitive devices for the pulse of disintegrant magnetic which was the telltale of a rocket tube explosion borne far in unimpeding space. At last it came, the muted thunder of many ships. Their faces told their dismay.

Brail said: "They are probably approaching the place where we left the false trails. They will undoubtedly follow one of them."

He laid his hand over the pilot's on the tube-firing levers, as though to keep the ship silent by his will.

Steadily the noise grew louder. Brail wondered if all their hopes for a sane, free life to be wiped out in the blazing rays from the Horde rulers' efficient young dupes. The sound grew—then died away, but not altogether. Now it was the staccato tick-tick of one ship that continued to follow Brail's ship on its

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course.

"They have split," cried Norla, passionately angry at the discovery. "They have sent ships on each possible course. We must have left some indication when we abandoned the circluar course and a part of the gas followed in our wake and left a faint trail which they could follow."

"We cannot change our course now without starting the rockets. They cannot locate us exactly unless we do that," Brail offered.

"The course is nearly our own but I don't understand how it can be just the same," Lori muttered. "He may follow that course until doomsday and if we give no sign he will not sight us."

"We shall let the ship ride as it is," the prince decided. "He will gradually overtake and pass us, unknowing."

That was just what happened. The tick - tick of the rockets on the pursuing ship grew into a great boom - boom from the augmentor, but no sign was given by Brail's ships and slowly the sound drew away ahead of them.

A week later they had still not turned on the rocket tubes.

Norla felt that if they did not run into the bunch when it was on its way back, they would be safe from the Horde's pursuit. At least for the time being. She declared to Lori that they would continue hunting until they discovered their quarry.

"They are animated by the fear in their rulers," she explained. "They have a fear of retribution and must stamp out all possible opposition. That fear in the rulers' minds is habitual, hereditary. It is their main motive for conquest. I have often read it in their minds. It is an ever - present thought.

"Of course, most of their thought is pure reflection from their thought-reading apparatus, never their own, but that thought is their own and it is always there, just as a dung-beetle always has a yellow belly. If any power exists but what they call their own, they fear it automatically.

IT WAS many months later when they hung over the city of Kosi on the planet Bilbak. For several days they had hung there just beyond vision range, taking stock of the city and its people over the thought - cloud's pictured rays. Kosi was the ruling city of the largest state on the planet. The peoples were not yet advanced to the state of space travel and were in truth in a state of barbarity, but they were humanized, a beautifully built race of deep brown color, never spoiled by contacts with the corrupt governments of space.

Brail had decided to take over the whole state by insinuating himself into the ruler's palace in the same way that he himself had been overcome by the Fat Ones who had ruled from behind the scenes. To do so was simplicity itself. He swept the great cluster of attenuated minarets that was the soaring roof of the palace with the vibratory ray, set at a rapid rate. The building was undamaged by the alternate push - and - pull of the magnetic, but the people fell unconscious from the concussion of brain jarring against their skulls. Then in the dark, with a great thunder of jets, the ship called **Starbound** hovered for a moment over the palace and a hundred parachutes blossomed briefly over the minarets and then were gone into the black shadows of the palace gardens.

When the courtiers returned to

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consciousness, Prince Brail and his hundred men were concealed in the private quarters of the ruler, and a hundred tiny mental control rays covered the mind of every important official in the building. They would in future act and think precisely as the rays told them to act and think, but none in the palace entourage could detect any change in them. In the morning the little fleet settled on the fields just outside the city.

The ruler, thinking by the will of Brail, ordered a great festival of rejoicing and a procession to welcome the mighty visitors from the skies. The planet was one with no tilt to the pole and of an even temperature. The people were of a happy and careless nature, especially on a festival day such as this one ordered by their ruler. They wore little more than garlands for they were not burdened by false modesty.

The visitors were driven from the ship to the palace in the center of the city, down an avenue of natural beauty. The motive of power of the conveyances was furnished by great, prong - horned deer, and the two - wheeled carts were hung with festoons of flowers. The space visitors were pelted with blossoms as they drove through the throngs. The people sang a song of welcome, a laughing song of many soft, lilting cadences. All this natural and kindly behavior was tremendously stimulating to the visitors, seeming to promise a really happy future, free of the horror they had known so long.

In the palace they were given apartments large enough to have accommodated twice as many guests. A great feast was spread and everyone seemed to get gloriously drunk in no time at all. The palace echoed with shrieks of laughter and the courtiers danced — it was a kind of overstrained and mercuric Mardi - gras. When at last the noise died down, the most prominent of the visitors were summoned to a council in the secret quarters now occupied by the red - haired prince.

MIRRLA sat beside the prince, who presided at a long table about which were seated his private councillors. The girl looked glowing with health, such had been the result of the treatments in Norla's chamber. Her eyes shone with pride at the success of their undertaking, as they rested fondly on the face of the prince. Lori and Norla, side by side, had eyes for each other more than ever.

Brail spoke: "It is possible to boil government down to a single principle, and succintly stated it is this: Remove evil intent. It is quite true that there would be no evil, no trouble in life for men, were there not an intent to make trouble living with them. We know what this intent is. It is caused by exterior detrimental force overwhelming the natural interior generative force of the mind, due to weakness and to a defective dielectric material that normally shields the cells and nerves from this ever-present and penetrative force, disintegrant electric.

"This defective will flow in a man's brain is the cause of evil, is evil in result for all of us. We know how to detect the pressure of this detrimental electric of the will in a man's body and brain. We have developed meters which register precisely the amount of this detrimental within a man, and also precisely the quantity of beneficial force, the natural electric of the cells' own generation. We propose to use these meters and our own

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experience in their application to remove all ill intent from this land we have surreptitiously taken over unknown to its people.

"Without the people's awareness of our methods, we shall test every member of this court and from them work down through the whole land until of all these millions of innocent, ignorant folk not one is left whose body harbors the weakness to respond to detrimental force flows instead of his own body's natural electric. Are there any dissenters from this plan?"

Someone murmured sotto voice: "It would be hard to dissent with your logic."

Brail smiled, then went on.

"After this first most important step has been accomplished, we shall build schools and factories for beneficial rays and stimulative mechanisms of various kinds. All the houses will be gradually changed to some form of Norla's life-chamber, where the beneficial force cannot get out but goes back and forth forever. When all this work is well under way and the people are happy and on the way to be intelligent, I have a project in mind which may be more to your liking than this one. It looks like a lot of work but it will not take as long as you may think, particularly as we shall train thousands of these young brown - skinned man animals in our advanced methods. They will be the future secret rulers, and we shall again be free, if we so desire."

"CAN'T we give them an elective form of government?" Lori queried.

"It will be a century before they could be ready for that. We can only give them intelligent, well-meaning rulers. Since those rulers will not be of their choice, it is better that the rule be secret and hidden."

"Why do you not take the throne, Prince Brail, and rule here openly? You are fitted for it and the opportunity is here," Lori said, and Norla nodded smilingly at his vehemence.

"Because there is a vast strength in secrecy for small groups, which I have seen enough of to covet for myself. As long as our rule is secret, our enemies will not know us, nor will they know what we do. An agent from the Horde, scouting among these people, would have no idea what to expect in battle from them. As soon as possible, our ships must leave, ostensibly taking us all away. Actually, we shall take the ships out of sight and then return to a hidden base which we must build at once.

"Soon all trace of our visit here will disappear, except that certain devices will rapidly be 'invented' and manufactured for general use. One of these must be a beneficial ray generator, to make the people smarter and healthier and incidentally, infinitely more decorative. Another is a thought helmet, which will enable them to know each other truly; that is a great remedy for evil mistakes, a thought augmentor. Such things will rapidly change the life of Bilbak. In ten years the citizenry will be far beyond the suppressed slaves of the Horde and other like empires of intelligence."

"In my opinion, prince, they are beyond them now," Lori said, smiling as he thought of the uproarious feast and dance that had surged about the palace and through Kosi all day. "They are carefree and happy. Their ruler is well meaning if not overly intelligent. We should see to it that our program of education doesn't rob them of their joy in life.

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I have never seen anything prettier than the unembarrassed love and laughter in that bunch of grown-up kids today."

The prince nodded, understandingly.

"I plan to protect and increase just those beautiful qualities in this race. We can expect trouble as soon as we begin to introduce change; trouble from the conservatives always present. You, Lori, will be our representative. You must announce to King Tholand an idea of what our plans are, and so prepare him, slightly for the changes coming. Let him know we intend to make his race strong and able."

"You're giving me a big job," Lori protested.

"You can do it, Lori," Norla declared, eyes flashing.

"That he can, Norla. Give the king a good talk. Sell him on what we intend to do for his people. I can control him but I don't want to have to bother all the time with any objecting will in his body."

THE testing of the citizenry of Kosi was received with much hilarity and met with popularity, entailing as it did many new and startling experiences like seeing one's thoughts take shape in the thought cloud of the apparatus and watching over friends' souls laid bare in the same way; receiving badges indicating one's status and particular capabilities. The detrimentally inclined were particularly pleased with the great honors shown them and with their badge which read "Potential Ambassador." They did not learn that they were to be ambassadors to an uninhabited planet until they stepped out of the ships and it left, abandoning them forever marooned where they could harm no - one.

The young people were particularly enthusiastic over the love-testing apparatus performance put on by the remaining unwed women of the expedition in selecting mates from among the stalwarts of Kosi. Although the young Kosians were to be honored greatly by alliance with such godlike creatures from the skies, the strangeness of such relations soon wore off in the hilarious proceedings. The desire of those innocent young men of Kosi for the women of the slave courts, who had been trained since childhood in all the arts of seduction, who had been chosen as concubines by the richest men of the empires of space from among the most beautiful women of a hundred densely populated planets, was a thing that taxed their meters to record.

While the women of Bilbak were beautiful enough, they had not the art of adorning and enhancing their beauty, nor had they been trained in the love - arousing motions of the body in dances and other arts of which a great empire is always productive. Although free to enter the competition, their meter readings were low when in competition with the women from space. Lori's heart went out to some of them as he saw them lose life - long sweethearts to the houris from the skies. To Norla he said: "Something should be done for those girls who are robbed of their lovers. It isn't fair."

"What would you do, Mirrla?" asked the green witch curiously.

Mirrla's solution was simple.

"We shall select the brown women especially to be trained in the use of stim and like apparatus. They will soon be able to choose whom they please from the men of Bilbak. Love can be created in any man by the proper use of the apparatus. A beauty school would

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not be a bad idea, either. They have such lovely bodies and such glowing life in them, it is a shame that they do not know how to make the most of their possessions."

MIRRLA had been intrigued by the clever way in which Brail had not neglected more serious matters, even while attempting to create a newer and happier way of life for Kosians. A month had barely slipped past before the expeditionary fleet lifted from the surface of Bilbak, ostensibly leaving forever; actually to disappear into the night, only to cradle in a cavern deep within the planet. Into this cavern Brail had sent many thousands of workmen and already two new spaceships were built up in skeleton form. All the mining tools, the smelting and metal treating machinery had to be created as the workers went along, for there was little if any of such apparatus in Kosi.

A year passed as swiftly as had that last month before the feigned departure. Now the factories were roaring night and day, making mental augmenting devices to awaken the people's awareness of life and create the incentive toward a fuller life of study and acquisition of the rare pleasures and arts brought them by the sky visitors. A chamber of the type developed by Norla was also manufactured and installed in homes selected by the meter tests of those most intelligent and most well intentioned socially.

Brail had been much amused and highly delighted when competition raised its head. He observed a bootleg stim and chamber factory come into being, selling a spurious set of apparatus of apparently similar kind to those unlucky enough to have been left out of first choice distribution of the genuine. He had not really thought the race developed enough to understand and manufacture those complicated devices and was more than pleased to find that the copy was not harmful electric, but developed a mild beneficial result. Progress had arrived among the Kosians.

The red-haired prince was also much gratified at the way Norla became persona grata with the Kosians. The people realized how much time she gave them, working with her rays and with newly developed rays, and knew that over the conductive paths of the beams she always sent some of her love polarizing magnetism, tuned to the electric of her own body, so that they could not help but love her. Her strange green beauty attracted them as it had the young pilot, in a weird, unearthly way. They could not keep her out of their minds and hearts and worshipped her, many quite openly and formally prayed to her as to a goddess.

WHEN the time came for the exodus of the sky visitors, Norla and Lori elected to stay behind and remain in the public eye and by Brail's counsel to become in time the trusted link between the secret rule by Brail and the open rule of the native princes. This the prince had asked them to do because they were the most popular with the court.

The weeding out of the dull and illintentioned had brought life and sparkle to the court which complemented the love and enthusiasm that burned in the tall green body of Norla as many lights complement a diamond. The dark vigor of Lori, always at her side like a devoted guard, set off her fair, cool emerald fire, for their love, which

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Norla had built to supernatural pitch with her wizardy, became a kind of legend among the Kosians, who spoke of two lovers being as enwrapped in each other as the two from the sky, the good witch Norla and her soldier spouse.

Within the year, Brail had built a fleet of twenty small fighter spacers. These he set as a guard about the planet Bilbak to warn of invasion. Likewise great vibro - guns were set in every city to protect against unexpected invasion. Now he was able to visit Kosi as a stranger, arriving in a new ship from the factory caverns. He could at last propose the trip to discover that dark Goddess from whom he hoped to receive wisdom to evolve new weapons that would free Kosi forever from any fear of an invasion from the Horde that could be in the smallest degree successful.

Thus it was that the apparatus and Brail's wisdom and Norla's inventions infused a new spirit into the land of Bilbak. With the meters for testing character, as well as the thought cloud projection apparatus always at hand in the court, with which the councillors sounded each others natures to the depths, all knew each other so well that trouble and strife did not get a chance to breed. Norla, working with long range apparatus, instilled an abstract love for their fellows deep into the core of each of the key men of the government as well as in most of the merchants and important personages. It was not long before the city became a little Utopia and its happiness and unique new methods spread like wildfire over Bibak.

Shortly after that momentous year had passed, filled with the joy of accomplishment, a strange looking spaceship circled slowly over the city and settled to a landing at the city gates, after announcing friendly intentions over the television in the palace. Attended by a welcoming group, Norla and Lori went out to meet the strangers. With a sense of impending disaster Lori noted the uniforms of the Horde while he and Norla were yet at a distance. Then his discovery turned into keen but concealed amusement when he recognized at the head of the waiting visitors Prince Brail, resplendent in the uniform of an admiral of the Horde. What was the reason for this masquerade, thought Lori, puzzled. He recognized the prince's attendants as some of his comrades, once more in their old uniforms.

"Lori, what is Brail doing in a Horde uniform?" queried Norla.

"We'll soon find out," the young pilot replied and laughed as they approached the visitors.

The men of the Horde whipped hand rays from under their tunics, deployed so as to surround the peaceful welcoming party, and then in a loud voice the red - haired prince demanded the bodies of Norla and Lori, or they would be dropped dead in their tracks. There was no possibility of resistance, as the newly built apparatus in the palace at Kosi, although overlooking the scene, was in the hands of men who knew Prince Brail as their real ruler. Hence it was but the work of a few minutes to seize the green witch and her spouse, several of the slave girls, and a dignitary from the court particularly liked for his constant witticisms and hustle them roughly aboard the ship, which then took off with a roar into the heavens. The people, furious, stood around consumed by their impotence, for Norla and Lori were beloved by the entire nation.

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"JUST what," asked Norla indignantly of Brail, "is the idea of kidnapping us in this rude fashion?"

"First of all, lovely Norla, I longed to see your faces. And secondly, I wanted to show these beautifully careless Kosians that they must prepare for danger always or be overcome at the first blow. My men are going to launch a campaign of preparedness on the strength of this little incident which will not cease until the whole planet of Bilbak is impregnable to any known modern method of assault. Last of all, I am going on a little trip into a dark place," he grinned, "and I need Lori as a guide and Norla for her wisdom. Is that clear?"

Mirrla and the green witch embraced as if they had been parted for years and went off on some feminine business of apparently vast importance, judging by the chatter that marked their going.

Lori accompanied Brail to his cabin. There the prince broke out a vast book of space charts.

"You may remember, Lori, that constant dream of yours about a dark Goddess of life, afar in space? I spoke to Norla long ago of your dreams and her part in them and she gave me an idea that consumes with curiosity to see if she is right. She is so often right, that I can hardly doubt her.

"She has made a study of dreams, knows what causes them, how to create them, in fact, all about them. She told me that she had not created your dream of the dark Goddess in space, but that its repetition through the years proved to her beyond a doubt that you were sensitive to some great living thing in the part of dark space that seemed to draw you; that she knew beyond a doubt that some god - like being lived there in space pretty much as you dreamed about its doing.

"Now I propose that we go there and if this great being exists and is the beneficient force you picture her, she will give us wisdom, perhaps even the wisdom of immortality; at the very least we shall obtain a knowledge that will enable us to build weapons to make our little world of happy people truly impregnable. What do you think?"

Lori was very thoughtful as he replied: "Norla may be right. As you say, she so often is right. Certainly such a being would not harm us. I am not certain that I can guide the ship there, but I certainly can feel the direction in my mind, as though I were a living compass."

"It will be a great adventure," cried the prince.

"If mischance should come, our people of Kosi are started on the road to fairer life. If we succeed, the road to broader life will be easier and quicker to find. Besides, it is an old ambition of mine, to take my own ship and go there into the dark spaces.

"Did you notice the ship particularly as you entered?" asked Brail. "Come, I want to show you the life boats." Outside the cabin, a tight little twenty - man trip - ship lay in its tube, ready for instant launching. "You didn't see it, did you? On the bow is painted the name of the mother - ship . . . **Lori.**

"Since the expedition is to your goddess, I have named the ship for you, my friend. Since in truth it changes nothing I make you a gift of it. Do as you will, however, I must go along."

THE young pilot stared at the red - haired prince gratefully. His voice was choked with emotion when he managed at last to speak.

"Our wishes are coincident, my

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leader. It changes nothing; I understand what you mean. I thank you for your generous gift. I shall serve you well with it, be sure. The **Lori** is a beautiful ship. When did you build her?"

Brail explained that he still had the plans for the original five ships that had been built in Bersalt caverns. There had been added to this new ship several improvements, after detailed examination had been made of the ships captured from the Horde. "Much apparatus is from ships spare parts, carried in our own ships. She represents the combined knowledge of two empires of space modified by our own lack of workmen and technicos and proper equipment to build her with, yet she is the fastest ship I have yet had under my proud feet," the prince finished.

"It will take us a twelvemonth, I approximate, to reach the dark spaces," Lori estimated. "It has always **felt** to me to be beyond the star of Wilotar."

"You do not yet know the rate of speed of your ship, Lori. At our acceleration of 500 miles per second, we should reach that area in little more than half the time you make it. But it will take some time to figure out how to reach the precise spot and we cannot do much searching at high speeds. So it may in the end take the time you say, although our return trip will be much quicker because we will know exactly where we are going."

"You seem satisfied that you will actually find some great being there Brail," commented the other man.

"Since Norla says it is no vision, but a strange sensory perception of a living fact, yes, I do feel sure."

FREE of the apprehension of pursuit, with a feeling of worthy accomplishment behind them and an immense anticipation of the adventure ahead, the trip seemed an idyll. The muted thunder of the activating rockets at last died and the quiet that is space at its best lulled the whole ship into a restful state of timeless enjoyment of each other's company.

Norla's special apparatus had been installed in the ship and a strong focusing field about the entire ship brought a stimulating richness of that essence of life - energy ash, which fills space, into the very core of the vessel. Her reflecting materials coated the interior of the ship except at the points where the field focii entered the hull and the result was a strong concentration of the stuff from which all matter, including living matter, grows. This richness of life material gave the senses an immense power of perception; every natural function, including thought, increased steadily in potency until life aboard ship became an unbelievable idyll of stimulating mental contact, brilliant conversation, and incidentally, love between the sexes. So the travel year passed like a dream, a very beautiful and precious dream, filled with loved faces lit supernaturally by intelligence and infectious gayety and also with deep and irresistible love.

The owner of the new ship spent many hours in the control room in the bow, peering at the instruments for first sign of the goal ahead and at last he corrected the course to a certain pair of dark planets. The source of the abstract mental call seemed to come from these or near them.

THIS was dark space, these two planets had never been under the light of a sun. They could only

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be detected by obstacle alarm instruments until the **Lori** approached within appreciable gravitational influence. They swung into a wide orbit about the pair of planets. Every instinct told Lori that this was the source of the call of the Dark Goddess. But though he sensed her presence strongly, he could not tell precisely what he was expected to do. Norla solved this problem.

"You put on the cap of the thought cloud device, and go to sleep. Then you will dream of your Goddess and we will watch the dreams in the cloud's pictures. Surely if she makes the dreams or if your dreams are a reflection of her powerful thought - life, we can tell more about her from the strong augmentation of your perception of her in the thought - cloud."

So Lori swallowed a couple of sleeping tablets, donned the thought-cloud's helmet, and drifted off to sleep under the caressing hand of his beloved Norla. Soon the swirling vapors of luminous mist in their prisoning magnetic field gleamed with the dream's beginning.

Below the frigid surface of the nearer planet was a strong beautiful life calling in a voice that never ceased. Toward this voice Lori was flying, an arrow of mist. Through the hard granite and frozen air of the surface — through the gradually warmer strata of rock — to emerge at last in a cavern filled with rosy light everywhere, and swift and happy feet racing by. Plants of awesome luxuriance hung their fruits and flowers over the webs of paths. Laughter tinkled always there, and love was a thick, supporting essence in the scented air.

But the questing mist that was the dream of Lori flew on through the cavern, to rest at last before a great pool of green, sea - scented, lapping water surrounded by marble seats where many people sat, but did not speak. They were waiting by the pool of the Goddess, and Lori waited, too.

Presently the water swirled and broke in many silver gleamings and from the center rose the vast and beautiful head, the long dripping hair that was not hair, the great eyes and wide scarlet mouth, the gleaming shoulders and tremendous long arms ending in webbed fingers, the red tipped breasts, the pillaring waist, the hips that did not divide into legs but into two great serpentine drivers, ending in the wide tail fins of a fish.

She was a tremendous creature from some forgotten sea, and she took a throne - like seat above them, her silent adoring people. They bowed their heads, and then all began to speak at once. But she pointed at the nearest, and they stilled. He, a man of green skin like Norla, spoke.

"ABOVE us in the dark a ship circles in answer to the call. It is long since one has answered the ancient call, and so we do not know if they are to be admitted."

Her voice was a great bell of meaning in the cavern.

"Of course, admit them. The Gods of the Dark Places do not refuse the children of the deadly sun's their wisdom. That is why the call exists, why the great vibrations of the dream - maker mechanism throb always through the surface towers — to call the worthier sons of the mortals away from their deadly sun's light and into the dark of space where they will not die. Admit them, teach them, then bring them to me."

The great voice ceased and the

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people filed out of the room, and the woman who was not a woman, but an ancient Goddess sat dreaming above the scented water, her great webbed hands supporting her face. And the mist that was Lori drifted up and caressed that face and she smiled, saying softly — "I **know.**"

And presently Lori awoke. But he did not forget the dream as Norla and Brail and Mirrla had watched the thought - cloud while he slept. As Lori arose Brail spoke—

"I take it that we are to be admitted to something very strange and very beautiful, those caverns beneath the icy face of that world below. But what did she mean by mortals and Gods. Do you suppose they are immortal?"

"I think we are going to learn," cried Mirrla as the ship swerved suddenly under a new impulse and began to sink swiftly toward the dark, frozen world.

A great opening glowed brilliantly below and from it tall beams of power played upon the **Lori,** drawing it in slowly. Soon they were nested in the vastly too large cradles of the entrance and behind them a great airlock swung shut. Air hissed into the great cavern entrance chamber.

As they hesitated before the door locks of the **Lori,** a voice said in their ears —

"It is quite safe to come out. You are in our power anyway."

It was so that they entered the caverns of the Dark Goddess.

PRESENTLY they stood before her and gasped to see the vitality that shone from her, to feel its strong surge through their bodies tell them that a God's life is a powerful life. Her skin was black as night itself, with a purple irridescence rippling over it like heat lightning, her lips were a scarlet flame about her gleaming teeth.

They looked long on her and she on them. At last Brail spoke.

"All my life I have heard of Gods and Goddesses, demons and angels, efrits, leprechauns and other immortal beings. They were supposed to live forever, and yet I have always seen death to be inescapable by any life form. If you are immortal, tell me why you are immortal and others mortal. For I do not believe in immortality."

Her answer was long in coming—

"Long ages ago, a great ship set out from its mother planet. They were loaded down with all the requirements, the equipment for living, to colonize another earth, far away. Among them were some very wise scientists. Their ship broke down far from the light of any sun, in the deserted depths of dark space. They drifted to a landing upon a frozen earth, an inhospitable world, apparently. They could not repair their ship, and when their fuel began to run low, they burrowed deep tunnels into the rock, where the pressure creates heat. There at the level where the warmth was best suited to their nature, they carved out a dwelling, moved in their machinery and equipment and food supplies, brought frozen earth from the surface and planted seeds.

"It was a terrible task. At first many died. But after a while they learned how to live in the caverns where the pressure serves the purpose of heating, and the difference in temperature from the surface can be used to build thermo dynamos to create power and make artificial light for the plants. After children came, they grew numerous again.

After a lifetime had passed, they

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learned a tremendous thing. None of them had grown old. Instead, they had grown young; instead of aging, they were growing like children again. At first they could not understand this, but their scientists solved the mystery. Their suns were the cause of their age; where there was no sun, there was no age.

"So the first immortals of dark space came into being. I am, partly a child of that race, though my seed was altered in their birth laboratories to adapt me to life in the sea. This planet is at present my home until I grow too big for it, then I will find a larger. It amuses me to call the mortals of the sun blighted worlds to me, that they may learn how to live in the dark lands. So it was that you heard my great transmitter of the dream - call. So — you are here."

Her great voice went on —

"Now you are free of the deadly little sun seeds which gather in the body and kill all life near a sun. Now the older you get the stronger and larger and wiser you will be. You may stay with us until you have learned our methods of life, then you may choose whether to join my people or seek your own way of life. Many people used to come, to stay with me always as my friends and my strength. But they come no longer, something has happened to them. I am Alfreya, the Dark Goddess. You are welcome here."

THE medicoes of the people of Alfreya were men who had lived under her age - old wisdom for centuries. They had learned things no mortal man ever learns. Soon after Brail's party arrived, a dozen or more of these scientists arrived in their quarters, accompanied by a formidable array of apparatus. They inoculated, injected, transfused bottles of gleaming fluid into their veins, took x-rays, measurements, blood - tests. For days this went on and the last treatment of all was this:

"You see, each cell of the body feeds upon subtly different substances, all of them manufactured from the ordinary food by the glands and organs of the body. And there are several substances and compounds which occur naturally in food, which are more acceptable to some types of cells of the body than others. We synthesize most of these compounds, and by injecting certain ones into the blood stream, any particular type of cell can be fed better than the others. Now, the nerve cells of the body and the thought cells of the brain are the most important in the body; their health or illness determines the character of the human, as well as his awareness to pleasure, danger or pain. This injection is of those substances most needed by these cells. It will cause a renewed growth of the whole sensory system as well as of the brain. You will find your awareness of life increasing tremendously, your fingers almost able to see, your pleasure nerves a hundred times as able to transmit pleasure impulses to the brain — while your thought becomes a multiple of the normal amount to which you are accustomed. This injection is your entrance into Nirvana, the place where people dwell who can really feel, think and have emotions. Your past life will become a dull gray memory to the vivid, intense life you will now lead."

They injected, from hypodermics of a huge size, a yellow fluid slowly into their veins. It ran like the fire of love through their bodies, strange new colors coruscated before their

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eyes as the powerful stuff began its work. They could hear men thinking at great distances, feel the vibrations of a man walking a half-mile away. Every perception became a tremendous thing to the puny sensation it had been, as the growing nerve cells began to function at a strong new rate of growth and renewal. Already they were more than human.

TO NORLA, the greatest thrill in those caverns of the frozen world of the Immortal Goddess Alfreya, were the libraries of books from the myriad Dark Cities of Endless Life on her race's planets. Written by men who had had an age, a thousand thousand years to learn how to tell a man what they wished, illustrated by artists whose hands had painted with the brush for uncounted centuries, these books were too vast of meaning for a mortal to fully understand, but their beauty and immense significance were irresistible. What she could learn from them was so illuminating, so fascinating to her that Lori could not get her out of the book rooms even to eat.

Months went by, and daily they attended classes, for Alfreya's planet stood at the edge of a sun-poisoned area, and was formerly a sort of entrance school for mortals who were to enter the immortal paths of the dark areas of space. Now the ships came no longer to answer the call the huge thought transmitters sent out forever. Lori surmised this was due to the stupefying influence of the pleasure ray cliques such as ruled the Horde, who customarily removed anyone capable of thinking for themselves from the living.

In the classes they learned how the great underground greenhouses of the cities were built, how they were heated from water piped deep into the hot substrata and back again. They learned what light rays were needed by the plants and how to make them. How to build the thermo-electric generators which operated on the difference in temperature between the surface cold and the hot rocks of the depths. They learned how to build a disintegrator powerful enough to bore such caverns into the shell of a frozen planet without labor. And from this disintegrator Brail designed a weapon which he was sure would protect the little world he had set on the path to greatness from the power of the Horde.

This had been his original purpose in the trip to the Dark Goddess, to obtain a weapon to make his planet impregnable to the Horde. But now he knew the hideous nature of sun poisons, and knew that his real problem was how to transport the masses of people from his sunblighted planet to some new and sunless world.

THE **Lori**, after some months, was equipped with these small but infinitely powerful in-oxygen generators and Brail felt that no ship in sunward space could meet them in battle and live.

When Alfreya at last pronounced them ready to begin their own immortal life on a frozen planet, they bade their immortal friends a grateful, temporary farewell, and once more the **Lori** lifted into the ever-night.

Over a council table that night, the friends sat long, their now wiser, infinitely more sensitive and loving faces frowning. Brail summed up their decision.

"So we will make one trip to our friends, back into the deadly light. We will set up the machinery for

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transporting all the people to our new home on the planet Alfreya suggested. We will start the building of the migration ships, then outfit our present small fleet and leave ahead of the migration to prepare a home for them. It is a big job but it is our duty. I think we have seen enough of things called men who fail to do their duty. So be it."

They lifted their glasses in a toast —

"To the new and immortal race we will build and to our new found friends, the Gods who dwell in the space - dark. And to our leader who has made this future possible — All Hail. May he continue to lead us forever."

The happiness that sure knowledge of an infinite future of life and growth and youth gave them showed on their faces in a strangely hallowed light as they drank.

THE END

LETTERS

Dear Ray:

I've been wondering who would be the first SF editor to realize the opportunity of exploiting the flying saucer craze with a Flying Saucer-science fiction magazine. So now I know, by reading Fantasy-Times, that Ray Palmer, SF's greatest innovator, has originated a plan for combining flying saucers with SF. Your alternate issue brainstorm will undoubtedly displease some fans and your subscription department, but the general readers should love it—especially saucer fans.

I'm not sure that flying saucers is a big enough subject for any extended exploitation by SF. Will the saucer issues, as I suspect they will, also have fictional stories on the themes of reincarnation, mediumship, religion, deros and etc? Maybe you won't use any of the latter type of material in the first issues, but, if I know you Ray, it will be forthwithcoming, and "FLYING SAUCERS From Other Worlds" will become a sort of hybrid offspring of the old OW and Search.

I think it was a waste of space to squeeze out the letter column in the last ish in favor of an overlong but nevertheless good story by Barry Miller. "Tri-Infinity" seemed to be a short story distended to novelet length. I enjoyed Tri-I, but what this story has to tell could have been told much more effectively in much fewer words. Tri-I begins with a surge of power like a rocketship blasting off, and then slows down to give the reader his breath back for a while, but never managing to take up the breakneck pace again toward the climax. The acceleration is there, but it is like that of a freight train instead of a spaceship. The powerfully worded prose of the first few paragraphs generates too much excitement in comparison with the slower action of the next few thousand words. This episode would have been better as a "flashback" injected somewhere a little farther on in the story.

Almost everyone has wished at one time or another that they could suddenly change into a member of the opposite sex while keeping their same identity. They wish to suddenly awake into another world where all of their past life has been lived (up to a point depending upon age) as a member of the opposite sex. I think a VERY powerful SF novel could be written on this subject, because it is a basic human escape-wish. The success of the Bridey Murphy book is a result of the exploitation of a basic human escape-wish. Somebody's going to clean up with another "factual" book about this wish-fullfillment, as they or some

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one else remembers a past life as a member of the opposite sex. Escape-wish and SEX combined equal dynamite.

Miller uses this escape-wish in Tri-I to concoct one of the most unusual sexy love affairs ever to see print in a SF story. It has a Freudian impact seldom found in mainstream literature. How about a story where the hero suddenly finds himself clothed in a beautiful female body—the one he would have had in the present world if his father's egg had carried the female seed instead of the male seed? Imagine his frustration as he tried to save the world from a cosmic menace as a woman! WOW! What a story such as this hasn't got to offer in the way of sex, the Postoffice only knows!

A digest OW would drown in the sea of digest mags that flood the newsstands. OW is one of the two pulp SF zines and it seems that most stands group SF in one display. The pulps are stacked with the covers SHOWING, while the digests are stacked one on top of the other. Size, if nothing else, plus the fact that your cover has a better chance of being noticed than the digest covers, should attract a stray newsstand browser's eye now and then. Another reason for keeping the present format is that the type size of OW is slightly larger than that of your other mag Search, and the larger the print, the less the eyestrain. So please don't change OW's pulp format if at all possible.

Bill Conner
Amarillo A.F.B., Texas

No, we won't have any reincarnation, mediumship, religion or deros as such in our flying saucer issues. We take flying saucers seriously! As a single subject! Not that the other stuff doesn't interest us, but that's for SEARCH. But if there is such a thing as reincarnation, YOU will be a girl next time around! . . . Rap.

Dear Rap:

The March issue of OW has sparked me into composing a letter, mostly of comment. The cover pleased me to no end. The yellow backing, red logo, and several scattered photos produced an extremely pleasing and desirable effect. Photos on the cover are very good, sometimes. November, I was very disappointed in the orange around the uninteresting picture of Eve Martin. But this time you hit the proverbial nail on its head. These particular photos make for good variety. A beautiful girl, a nauseatingly horrible creature, and the cross of the two extremes, Mr. Forry Ackerman. Such variety.

Through the years I have always found your editorials to consist of a rambling enthusiasm that is hard to find in any other magazine. You make it all seem like the pleasure you claim it to be, and not the work others make it out to be. For a while, editorials in my fanzine were as enthusiastic as yours, but they have since lost much of that quality, while yours have maintained their energy thru these many years. One of the best effects brought about by these enthusiastic editorials is the hominess it gives the reader. OW seems more like a fanzine than a promag because of this air of friendliness. And yet, you keep OW commercial. This is an extremely desired effect.

After weighing the advantages and disadvantages of your large size, I have come to a definite conclusion. KEEP OW LIKE IT IS.

SCIENTIFILM SEARCHLIGHT is a very welcome addition, but the photos are even more welcome. These add much to the interest of the article. If people don't believe that there exists considerable friendliness between pro sf mags, they should take notice that there is in that ish a pic of Marla English reading the September Fantasy and Science Fiction. In other fields, you would generally see a person reading the same magazine a photo appears in.

"Tri-Infinity" was excellent, and a credit to both you, OW, and science fiction as well. I'm certainly glad to see a magazine going in for long stories as you have been doing. I enjoyed "Tri-Infinity" almost as much as "The Timeless Man", which I considered absolutely perfect. "Tri-Infinity" lacked illustrations, but it seemed necessary to get all the wordage in, and the story managed to keep going well enuf to overshadow the lack of illos. I was glad to see you giving new comers to the pro field a good chance, as is shown by Adkins getting the lead and only illo for this great story.

"Magician—Second Class" was very cute, but I feel it could have been developed more. I felt cheated at not having more story to read.

Ron Parker
714 W. 4th St.
Tulsa 7, Okla.

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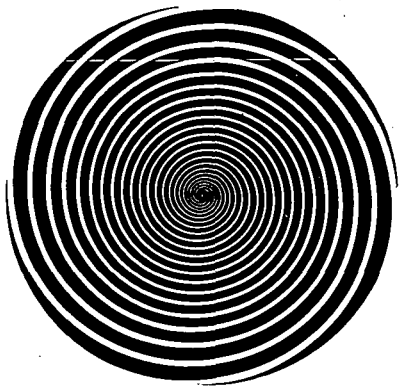

The Spiral to the left is printed in an enlarged form in

THE HYPNOTISM HAND-BOOK

Have your subject gaze fixedly at this spiral and then READ TO HIM the hypnotizing techniques given WORD FOR WORD in Chapter Two of this "Handbook of Hypnosis for Therapy." As soon as he is hypnotized, READ TO HIM the particular WORD FOR WORD therapy which applies to his particular problem. Many such therapies are given, always in the exact WORD FOR WORD form, which is essential in any scientific or professional use of hypnosis.

There has never been a book like this. A few years ago an article in **Western Family** said about its principal author: "Along the west coast, the 'hypnotism man' whose students you'll most likely run into, is Charles Edward Cooke."

Cooke has taught doctors of medicine, dentists, psychiatrists, psychologists, ministers of the gospel, nurses, and many others, from San Diego, California, to Spokane, Washington. Cooke has mass hypnotized as many as 400 people at once by READING the WORD FOR WORD hypnotizing technique in this work.

Although written for the professional man, this book will have a wide appeal among laymen who seek precise methods rather than the vague directions that have hitherto been available. THE HYPNOTISM HAND-BOOK was written by Mr. Cooke in collaboration with science-fiction novelist and short story writer A. E. Van Vogt.

Chapters from **THE HYPNOTISM HAND-BOOK**

CHAPTER 1: A dialogue example of a new skeptical patient on whom mild hypnosis is applied to gain the patient's confidence and at the same time tell a good deal about hypnosis.
CHAPTER 2: This is the Basic Word for Word Technique for Inducing Hypnosis.
CHAPTER 3: What You Should Know for Your 1st Hypnosis.
CHAPTER 4: The Mechanics of Hypnotizing.
CHAPTER 6: Variation of Speed of Response.
CHAPTER 7: Disguised Hypnosis—Its Use in Therapy.
CHAPTER 8: Relaxing the Patient.
CHAPTER 10: Conditioning in Auto-Hypnosis—Monologue Method Word for Word.
CHAPTER 12: Hypnotic Re-education.
CHAPTER 13: Insomnia.
CHAPTER 14: Headache.
CHAPTER 15: Constipation.
CHAPTER 16: Overweight: Reducing; Dr. and Patient.
CHAPTER 17: Breaking the Habit of Smoking.
CHAPTER 20: Hypnotic Anaesthesia.
CHAPTER 21: Painless Childbirth.
CHAPTER 22: Hypnosis in Dentistry.
CHAPTER 23: Working with children.
CHAPTER 25: Confidence—for Doctor and Patient.
CHAPTER 26: Concentration and Retentive Memory.

Space does not permit a complete listing of all the material which is in this work.

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